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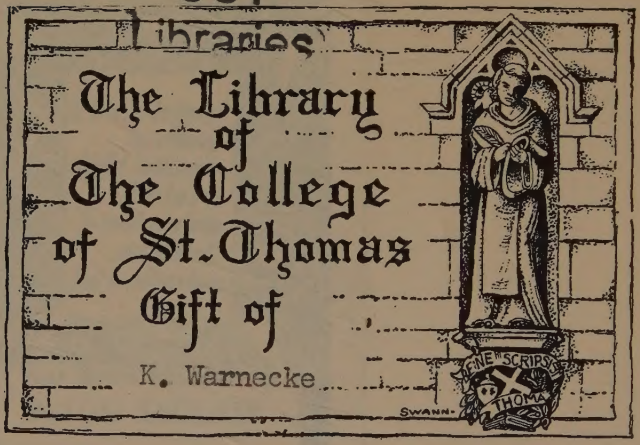
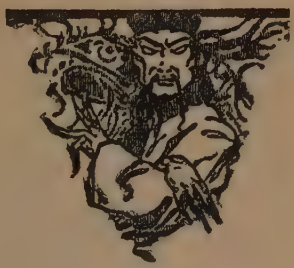


GREY FACE

It was there again, the deathly grey face.

GREY FACE

By SAX ROHMER



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GREY FACE

GREY FACE

CHAPTER I

THE DEATH MASK

IT WAS there again, the deathly grey face, sometimes formless—sometimes resembling a mask of Anubis, the jackal-headed god of Egypt! But always, though at one moment veiled and in the next blazing brilliantly, malignantly—always those strange, compelling eyes looked out from the mask.

Carey was dreaming, of course; yet even so he could not account for these impressions. It was a long time since he had delved into Egyptian studies, although possibly recent publicity given to the opening up of Tût-ankh-amen's tomb might have revived old memories. But the thing was becoming a nightmare. He realized before it became an obsession that he must trace this phenomenon to its origin and deal with it according to the theories of modern science. It was absurd that his sleep should be disturbed night after night in this fashion by dreams of the ghostly grey face of Anubis.

So thinking, Douglas Carey awoke and found himself staring intently at a queer little ebony figure. It was a figure of the Buddha, but not a conventional figure. It

represented Gautama holding in his lap a crystal globe which he contemplated dreamily.

"Good God!" said Carey, now widely awake.

He stared about his room in a dazed fashion. To one watching him he must have seemed bemused, a man but half commanding his senses—and, indeed, this was the case.

"I am not in bed!" he muttered, and raised his hand to his forehead.

He turned again to the little figure. It was no more than three inches high and it sat upon the red leather of his writing table immediately to the left of the polished brass inkstand. It was real enough, although it almost seemed to have figured in his dream. Left of it again was an ancient Korean bowl, the present of a friend who collected rare porcelain. In the bowl rested three pipes.

Carey remembered having laid the third there. He touched it, expecting to find it hot. It was cold. He looked down at the decanter and siphon which Ecko had placed upon the coffee-table beside him, and here was evidence that he was no victim of over-indulgence in pre-war Scotch whisky; for the decanter showed that at most he could not have taken more than two pegs.

Attracted by the hissing of the gas fire, he stared at it, and, gradually recovering command of his senses, noted that the water in a brass bowl set in the hearth was now nearly all evaporated. His glance wandered along to where, through half-drawn curtains, the outer room was visible, dimly lighted by one lamp. It was empty. Carey wondered why this fact surprised him.

Bruton Street was very silent, and no sound came

from the cabaret club, one wing of which he overlooked from his study window. Often enough, the merry-makers had disturbed him at his late toil. To-night he would have welcomed music, laughter, and the nearness of happy company; for—yes! fully awake now, he looked up at the Moorish lamp swung from the centre of his ceiling—he was frightened: childishly, superstitiously frightened. But he was in full command of his senses and accordingly he raised his eyes to the clock upon the mantelpiece.

Three A. M.

In the name of sanity, what had overcome him? At half an hour before midnight he had sat down to his report . . . his report! Now came the truth greyly dawning. This was no repetition of a dream. It was a recurrence of an experience of the previous night—hitherto inexplicably forgotten!

He turned feverishly to the writing pad upon his table. His pencil lay beside it. The pad was blank.

"Good God!" Carey muttered, and raised his hand again to his head. "Am I—am I going mad?"

Entrusted by the highest authorities with a task of great delicacy, he had on two occasions sat down to make his report—a report containing almost incredible facts, facts pointing to a conspiracy of dimensions hitherto unheard of, to the existence of some central control, combining criminal and political ambitions so ramified yet interwoven as to defy analysis—and on both occasions, it would appear, he had fallen asleep! Twice he had awakened to find his writing pad blank. And the grey face—the deathly grey face: why did it linger, phantomesque, in his memory?

"Who's there?"

Carey turned sharply, staring into the dimness of the outer room.

He had become aware of a faint sound. It was vague, difficult to define, but yet, not quite of the kind to which he was used. This old house, of which his rooms occupied a part, was paraded nightly by mice and possibly larger rodents, for there was a provision dealer's establishment not far away. The walls had been catacombed by successive generations of long-tailed hermits; but this sound was not occasioned by mice, nor even by that unaccountable creaking which old buildings and old furniture emit when all else is still. It seemed at once near and remote.

"Who's there?" cried Carey, springing up and thrusting his chair back.

None answered, and he ran through to the outer room and to the door. The lobby was in darkness. He switched up the light and observed that the chain had not been put in place. He paused. The noise now proclaimed itself unmistakably to come from the lower stair. He pressed another switch and the stairs became lighted. Then, throwing open the door, he started back.

"Ecko!" he said sharply.

His Japanese servant, wearing a blue kimono over his night gear, and having his bare feet thrust into red slippers, was standing three stairs down.

Ecko smiled apologetically.

"I very sorry if I p'r'aps disturbing you," he said.

"Disturbing me!" Carey cried angrily. "What the devil are you doing out at this time of night and dressed like that?"

"No, I don't go out," explained Ecko, mounting to the lobby. "I creepa down all quiet and no light—no light. I t'ink you working and I don't try disturbing you."

Carey watched almost stupidly as the unmoved Japanese closed and chained the door, methodically turning off the lamps upon the stair; then:

"I am afraid I don't understand," he said. "Come in here for a moment, Ecko."

"Yes."

Carey entered the outer room, which served as a drawing room when he had guests, and standing by the piano, he stared grimly at his Japanese servant.

Ecko smiled apologetically, and there was so much faith in the dark eyes that Carey's suspicions became almost stifled.

"Ecko," he continued, "I don't understand. What were you doing on the stair?"

Ecko extended his hands in a characteristic gesture.

"You see," he explained, fumbling for words, "lasta night I hear noise while you working."

"What sort of noise?" Carey demanded.

"Lika—lika someone who come in and go out."

"Someone who came in? Last night? What! Do you mean into the study?"

"Yes. But I don't hear your speak, and so I come down."

"This happened last night, you say?"

"Yes," Ecko affirmed, "lasta night. I reading book, as you know at night—you allowing me, t'ank you—and lasta night I t'ink to hear someone come in. I t'ink it is a friend and all right. Then, I t'ink to

hear someone go and door close. So—I come down and all quiet, so—I knock on door, and no answer."

"On *this* door?" Carey interjected amazedly.

"Yes, here. I come in, all quiet, and look, and you asleep in chair."

"Why the devil didn't you wake me?"

"I don't know," declared Ecko, smiling in his naïve fashion. "But I go down to door, and look."

"Yes?" Carey prompted eagerly.

"Along—this way"—Ecko's gestures indicated the direction of Berkeley Square—"I see a lady go in a car. It move off, and——" Ecko paused.

"Well? Go on. What time was this?"

"About"— he closed his eyes reflectively—"one."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes—sure." Ecko nodded most emphatically.

"Well, Ecko?"

"Yes," Ecko continued obediently. "So I don't know how to t'ink and I go back to bed. I only t'ink p'r'aps somet'ing not all right. So to-night, I listen."

"Well," said Carey, keenly interested, "and what did you hear?"

"About half-past two——"

"Half-past two," Carey muttered. "What then?"

"Then," continued Ecko, "I hear like someone come in."

"But," Carey interrupted, "did you hear me go down to the door?"

"No. Lika no one go down. Someone, I t'ink, come in."

"But how?"

"I don't know. So, I wait, and then, two, t'ree

minute I hear on the stair like creaking. So, I come down—all quiet. I t'ink it is not all right—and I go down to door, and look."

"You are not going to tell me," cried Carey, "that you saw a woman getting into a car again on the corner of Berkeley Square?"

Ecko smiled, nodding vigorously.

"Yes," he declared; "about half, quarter, minute ago. I t'ink the same, but I don't know."

"Did you knock on my door to-night?"

"Yes."

"Did you come in?"

"Yes, I come in, and you asleep, lika last night. It is for that I go down to look. I t'ink, very funny."

"Funny!" Carey muttered. "It is far from funny."

There was a challenge in his glance as he stared at the Japanese. But Ecko inclined his head and extended his hands.

"I wanting only to do"—he searched for words—"to make sure, ev'ryt'ing right. I t'ink, very funny."

"Good enough," said Carey. "I don't doubt your word. You can go to bed now. I sha'n't want you again to-night."

"All right!" Ecko smiled. "Good-night. T'ank you."

"Good-night."

Carey for a while watched the man mounting the stairs, and:

"Thank you, Ecko," he said.

He crossed and closed the door. Then he turned and walked slowly back to his writing table. Seating himself, he stared at the blank pad. And as he

stared, his eyes narrowed, and he bent forward, touching the paper. He ran his thumb along the edge of the pages, and:

"Good God!" he muttered. "What have I been writing?—and where has it gone?"

Quite clearly he could recall the last time he had, consciously, written on the pad. The bulk of the pad had appreciably decreased. Fully twenty sheets were missing!

Very still he sat, striving to muster his mental resources —to pluck out of a horrible forgetfulness even one little memory of those vanished hours. And all that he could recover was the image of a smoke-grey face floating mistily in some unexplored and unexplorable cavern of his subconscious mind.

He was in the presence of a phenomenon striking at the very roots of sanity; calculated not only to ruin his own career but also to involve others in nameless peril. He bent over the blank page, studying it with an almost feverish intensity.

It was his custom to draft all his work in pencil, to make a final copy in ink and then, in the case of a confidential report, to type it out with his own hand. Last night and to-night he had sat down to draft a report to Sir John Nevinson.

He now began automatically to fill a pipe. His nerve must be steady; his brain must be cool. And before he had finished loading the tobacco he had penetrated a little way into that cavernous greyness and had recaptured two definite memories. Last night, and again to-night, he remembered having written the words: "Confidential Report to Sir John Nevinson, K. C. B."

Douglas Carey's association with the Commissioner of Police was of a peculiar nature; it was an association not even suspected by Carey's most intimate friends. But during the final phases of the war he had displayed such uncanny genius for a form of analytical reasoning, that he had been recalled from his unit and appointed to the department of the War Office over which at that time General Sir John Nevinson presided.

With the coming of peace Carey had returned to his long-interrupted literary work, and Sir John had stepped across from Whitehall to New Scotland Yard. His faith in his brilliant young subordinate had never wavered; and the first big problem of Sir John's administration—a matter connected with Ireland—had led to Carey's receiving a flattering offer from his old chief. He had accepted without hesitation; and from a bewildering chaos of reports, diagrams, photographs, finger-prints and statistics, had unerringly extracted the key to the mystery. On three subsequent occasions Sir John had employed him, and Carey had been uniformly successful. Now, when the Commissioner had again called upon him, to analyze a mass of data touching this new, stupendous conspiracy—was he to fail? Worse—had he failed already?

Carey lighted his pipe and almost fearfully bent his gaze once more upon the blank page. For three parts of the way down it was deeply indented. Beyond doubt, this was an impression of the writing upon the preceding page—which had been torn off!

"It is," Carey muttered, "it is! But I must make sure—I must make sure."

In a little bronze tray lay a heap of cigarette and pipe

ash. Lightly dipping his finger into the ash, he rubbed it gently over the indented marks on the page, line by line, until the whole was covered. Whereupon, clearly legible except at points where the pencil pressure had been relaxed, the following proclaimed itself:

. . . may be summarized as follows: The disappearance of the Moscow-Berlin dossier from Downing Street is not an isolated episode. In my opinion, and I have given my reasons for . . . this inexplicable theft was performed by the same hand or under the same direction as . . . equally strange outrage upon . . . the King's Messenger on the Calais-Dover boat. Lord Brankforth and the Hon. Ewart Stephens are both above suspicion. But this, as I have pointed out, is not the only similarity in the cases. The third instance which I have cited, as the work of some individual or group . . . to exist, may seem remote from these two. Nevertheless, I think I have shown that the robbery on the 23rd instant of diamonds valued at . . . was characterized, in its essentials, by similarities pointing to the same agency. This at once widens . . .

Here the writing finished.

"God help me!" Carey groaned. "I had nearly completed my report. Yet I cannot remember having written one word of it!"

CHAPTER II

THE PSYCHO-ANALYST

"LET us exhaust the ordinary physical possibilities first," said Sir Provost Hope.

Douglas Carey had allowed his glance to wander around the room. The trend of Sir Provost's studies was unmistakable. Here was an autographed etching of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, here a copy of Houdon's bust of Cagliostro, whilst above the mantelpiece hung an extraordinary French oil painting depicting the Witches' Sabbath.

But the sun was streaming in from Half-Moon Street, and outside there were cars, taxis, and pedestrians passing. He was recalled to realities by the pleasant voice of the famous consultant.

"I should like to have found, Carey," Sir Provost continued, "that the explanation was such a simple one. But"—he smiled slightly—"I have tasted the contents of this small bottle"—he pointed to a phial on his writing table—"and I find it to be excellent Scotch whisky. Neither is there evidence of the presence of any drug in your tobacco. Therefore"—he fixed his keen glance on Carey—"we must look for some explanation outside the more simple physical agencies to account for your two mysterious lapses from consciousness. Now——" he paused: "your servant?"

"Ecko? I don't follow," said Carey. "He has been with me for five years and I trust him implicitly. Apart from which, since neither my whisky nor my tobacco was doped——"

"Nor even the contents of the siphon which you were using," Sir Provost murmured. "I am quite satisfied that it contained ordinary aërated water."

"This being so," Carey continued, "why suspect Ecko?"

"Well"—the curiously penetrating regard of the specialist's blue eyes rested upon Carey—"has it occurred to you that this man may be a hypnotist?"

"What!" Carey cried. "Ecko?"

"Why not?" Sir Provost continued quietly. "The Japanese are a highly enlightened people, and your discovery of him upon the stair was rather significant. Are you satisfied that his explanation was true?"

"Of course, it is difficult to prove," Carey admitted; "but if there are unsuspected depths in Ecko, which I find it hard to believe, it is strange that he should have served me faithfully for five years, all over the world, and now have turned traitor."

"Yes," the other agreed, "strange, but not impossible. You see, Carey, yours is not a usual case. The causes of the trouble are not within, but without. It would appear that on two separate occasions you have written for two hours or more, with perfect clarity, judging from the reconstructed fragment, and have then entirely forgotten having performed the task. This resembles the interference of a hypnotist. Your recollection, on awaking, of a grey face contemplating you, is also significant."

"But the fact that what I had written was stolen while I slept," Carey interrupted, "brings the thing down again to the realm of the physical."

"Exactly," Sir Provost admitted, "and therefore should lead us to substantial data in our search for the origin of the mystery. Excluding Ecko for the moment, who else has access to your chambers? You have no other resident servant?"

"No."

"Can you think of any one who might have obtained possession of a key?"

"Two keys would be necessary," Carey replied, "one for the street door, which is closed at dusk, and the other for the door of my rooms."

"Of course"—Sir Provost smiled again—"this sort of thing belongs more properly to your province than to mine. No doubt you have satisfied yourself about the people who occupy the office on the ground floor, and the facts of the case are so much better known to you than to me that you have a far better chance than I of discovering who actually stole the draft report. My personal concern is to find an explanation of your strange lapses from consciousness. These, I am convinced, were due to some outside control, and your presence here to-day is sufficient evidence that you agree with me."

"I do," Carey admitted. "If I was not mad and not drugged, then the thing that happened to me last night and the night before is something outside my experience—something I cannot grapple with; but something which may come within your sphere."

"That is so," said Sir Provost, now keenly watching

his patient. "I am convinced, by our chat this morning, that your experiences are not due to any pathological nervous or mental condition. They are occasioned by some new, outside condition. Now, I have been in your chambers more than once, and in your study. I can visualize it, with its rather odd appointments, indicating"—he tapped his tortoise-shell-rimmed glasses on the blotting pad—"something of a nomadic life. I am going to ask you another question: Have you recently acquired any new piece of furniture, or any curiosity, particularly of an Oriental character?"

Carey stared reflectively at the speaker for some moments, then:

"You have certainly hit upon a fact," he answered, "whatever its significance. During the last few days I have acquired two Oriental, or pseudo-Oriental curiosities. Both are upon my writing table. An odd little ebony figure, one of them, apparently represents Buddha contemplating a crystal which he holds in his lap: the other, a curious green bowl, not unlike a soup plate in shape, is of very early Korean ware."

Sir Provost Hope, his massive head lowered and elbow resting on the table, ran his fingers through his hair, abundant and iron-grey. He smiled triumphantly. His eyes, which possessed that oddly penetrating quality belonging to the eyes of those who have practised hypnotism, became focussed upon his visitor; and:

"Think carefully before you answer my next question," he said. "On awaking from your unaccountable sleep, can you recall which object in your room first attracted your attention?"

Carey stood up impulsively.

"This is extraordinary," he declared, "almost uncanny. I clearly recall that the first objects which I noticed on recovering consciousness were those which I have described to you!"

"Good!" Sir Provost exclaimed. "I begin to see light."

Carey laughed shortly.

"You are surely not suggesting," he said, "that a mere inanimate object is at the bottom of the mystery?"

Sir Provost shook his head.

"Our materialistic age is very hard to convince," he replied. "But contemplation of almost any bright object may induce hypnosis. Is the Korean bowl glazed?"

"Yes; but I have no recollection of having contemplated the thing."

"Nor do I suggest that you did contemplate it. Nevertheless, we shall see. I think you told me that the ebony figure holds a small crystal?"

"It does," Carey nodded; "quite a tiny one, no larger than a Spanish nut."

"And now tell me," Sir Provost continued, "what you know of the history of these two pieces."

"As a matter of fact," Carey answered laughingly, "the bowl was presented to me less than a week ago by a celebrated comedian who is also a collector of porcelain——"

Sir Provost suggested a name and Carey nodded in confirmation.

"I am familiar with the collection and with the

man," explained Sir Provost. "Both are unusual. But this figure of Buddha?"

"Well"—Carey's expression betrayed a certain embarrassment—"perhaps I should preface my explanation with something which I have wanted to say to you for a long time."

Sir Provost Hope tapped his glasses gently on the blotting pad. "I quite understand," he said softly. "You wish to marry my daughter, Jasmine."

The cold voice in which he spoke somewhat discouraged Carey. "Of course," the latter said, "I have achieved a certain amount of success as a writer, but I have a long way to go yet; and as to my ancestry——"

Sir Provost moved his hand, checking the speaker, and raising his peculiar eyes, regarded him. The effect upon Carey was as though Sir Provost looked through him at some other man standing immediately behind his chair. He had suffered this singular regard before, and had always found it disconcerting.

"There are only a few of us to-day," the psychic expert declared, "who can afford to speak of our ancestry. Your ideas regarding Jasmine are perfectly familiar to me, and perhaps I know more of your ancestry than you realize. I am not speaking of your father, nor of your mother. These, my dear fellow"—he reached forward and grasped Carey's arm—"count for so much and yet for so little—so little. It is not the physical but the spiritual ancestry which is all-important. However, as a man of the world, I see in you a healthy young Britisher with a fine head and a profile which would have delighted Lavater. Regarding your professional success you are unduly modest.

To this I would add, that until you came to me in the character of a patient, I was unaware of your present association with the secret service, although I knew of your work for the Military Intelligence Department during the war. You are a clever man, and, on the evidence of others competent to judge, a man to be trusted." He extended his hand. "Count on my consent, Carey."

Douglas Carey, whose besetting sin was modesty, found himself at a loss for words, but he grasped the extended hand in a firm grip.

"I rather gather," continued Sir Provost, "that Jasmine hesitates. Am I right?"

"A point," Carey replied, "to which I was coming. It was in a sense because of Jasmine's rather odd moods that this figure of Buddha came into my possession."

"Really!" Sir Provost exclaimed, glancing at his table clock. "Can you give me the facts briefly? I speak, now, not as Jasmine's father, but as the consultant."

"Well——" Carey paused. "Of course, it is a little embarrassing. I rather hesitate to speak of myself—and Jasmine, to——"

"I quite understand. Please be as frank as you would be with any other medical adviser."

"Well, then, last Tuesday evening I called here for Jasmine by appointment. I was given a note in which she excused herself. I went back to my rooms. I was at work on the case which I have mentioned to you, and getting into slippers and a dressing gown, I sat down to make a few notes. At about half-past eleven, Captain Carlyon, an old friend, telephoned me

from a neighbouring dance club to remind me that Jasmine and I had promised to join his party for supper. He was so insistent and I so depressed that I shed slippers and dressing gown and went along to join him. I apologized for Jasmine, when, to my surprise, about half an hour later, Jasmine herself came in!"

"Ah!" said Sir Provost. "You belong to a generation, Carey, to which most men of my age are strangers. But I happen to understand. The daughters of to-day enjoy a liberty denied to the sons of yesterday. But I interrupt you."

"I feel painfully conscious," Carey continued, "of seeming to air stupid grievances. But—she was with a man whom I profoundly mistrust—and, I think, with good reason."

"You refer to M. de Trepniak?" Sir Provost suggested quietly.

"Ah!" Carey exclaimed. "You know this man?"

"Only by"—there was a perceptible pause—"report. But I agree with your estimate of his character."

"I am glad," Carey said simply, and continued with greater confidence: "Jasmine explained that Trepniak had called later, and, her headache having disappeared, that she had decided to go out after all. Her manner was odd. In fact, she seemed rather obviously to be avoiding me. As a result I did not see her leave, until, missing Trepniak, I made enquiries, and learned that he had driven her home some time before."

"I remember their arrival," said Sir Provost, drily. "Trepniak's car would have aroused the envy of the late Mr. Barnum."

"I must confess"—Carey laughed unmirthfully—

"that I was a little sore. I don't take this Continental showman seriously, myself, but it is a fact that his extravagances appeal to a good many women. In the end, as the club was closing, the party invited itself to my rooms, which brings me to the Buddha figure. Because one of the four must have left it behind."

"Who were the members of the party?"

"Bobby Carlyon and his wife; Pickering, a barrister whom you know; and a lady with whom he had been dancing during the evening, a Madame Sabinov. I am practically certain that it was she who left the Buddha upon my table."

Sir Provost regarded the speaker fixedly, and:

"Of course one has heard of Madame Sabinov," he said. "A possible explanation begins to dawn." He stood up. "My advice for the present, Carey, is this: Lock the ebony Buddha in some safe place and do not touch it or even look at it until you have seen me again. I should also recommend you to have a serious talk with Jasmine. As for your idea of seeking to be released from your government work, forget it. You are not the victim of an obscure mental trouble, as you feared: you have a powerful and an unusually equipped enemy!"

CHAPTER III

JASMINE

CAREY, his interview with Sir Provost concluded, was taking his hat and stick from Ford, the butler, when the sound of an opening door at the farther end of the corridor brought him sharply about. As he turned, a girl came out, paused, and stood stock still looking at him. Carey had secured his professional appointment with Sir Provost by dint of inducing the latter to receive him half an hour before the first patient upon his list for the day.

The girl who stood regarding him had obviously just returned from a ride in the park. Her red-brown hair was almost concealed beneath her hat, but her habit did full justice to her slim figure, and Carey, staring, infatuated, at the apparition in the doorway, decided, contrary to a former conviction, that riding boots did not necessarily disfigure the female foot.

"Jasmine!" he exclaimed, and advanced toward her.

The girl hesitated oddly. Her colour, freshened by exercise, began to desert her. And her eyes, which, despite their deeper blue, at times resembled those of her father, were lowered; almost, she seemed angry.

"Jasmine!" Carey repeated, and halted, feeling the unspoken rebuff.

Then she raised her eyes, but he could read no gladness in them; and, extending her hand:

"Good morning," she said. "Whatever are you doing here so early?"

"I came to see your father," he replied simply. "I had not expected or hoped to see you."

"I have just come in," she explained, in a queerly mechanical way. "I didn't know you were an early rising fiend." She became flippant. Carey thought that the mood was forced. "I'm going to have a tub and then—let me see——" She ticked the items off on her fingers: "Grapefruit, Shredded Wheat, toast and marmalade and a cup of coffee. After which, Douglas, with the aid of the *Daily Mirror*, which is thrilling, because one's name may crop up (with photograph) almost any morning, I shall become nearly human."

"I see," said Carey. "In other words, it is much too early for a chat."

"Why?" the girl asked, looking at him naïvely. "Is there something particular you want to talk about?"

"Yes," he declared. "I should have welcomed ten minutes' conversation."

"Oh!" She turned suddenly, so that he was unable to detect her expression. "Well, come up to the snuggery."

She started upstairs and Carey followed.

"Ten minutes, mind—I shall time you!"

"Ten minutes will be enough."

Jasmine paused, three stairs ahead of him, turned and looked down.

"Are you being rude to me?" she demanded.

He laughed, but not mirthfully, meeting her glance; and so they stood for a while until presently she dropped her lashes. Then:

"Go on," he said, and joined her where she stood.

Together they mounted to the first floor, entering the little room which was her own peculiar territory, every appointment of which seemed a part of her, inseparable from her individuality. It was oddly modern, yet its modernity could not conceal the woman who had planned it.

Jasmine snatched off her hat and threw it on a settee, releasing a shock of irrepressible red-brown hair. Then, throwing herself into an armchair:

"Give me a cigarette, Douglas," she begged. "My first as a rule is in my bath, but it's nice to be vicious sometimes."

Carey suppressed a sigh and, opening his cigarette case, offered it to the girl. In her present mood Jasmine always eluded him, and he recognized that she had deliberately adopted this manner as a defence. She had foreseen what was coming, he told himself bitterly, and meant, if it were humanly possible, to head him off. But whilst by no means aggressive, he possessed a quiet obstinacy which he had inherited from his father.

"Jasmine," he said, "why have you been avoiding me lately?"

"Avoiding you!" the girl cried, looking up at him; and a fascinating little frown appeared upon her smooth brow: "I thought you wanted to explain why you had been avoiding *me*."

"Really?" He laughed. "That, of course, isn't quite fair. I have 'phoned, and called and sent you a note. Is that avoidance?"

"Douglas!" The girl's expression was one of such absolute incredulity that Carey, watching her, could

not believe it to be assumed. "How can you stand there and say such things! *When* did you 'phone me?"

She seemed to be growing angry, and her anger was a song to the man who loved her. For although it was all an unpleasant misunderstanding, if she had been indifferent she would not have cared.

"Listen, dear." He spoke very quietly, seating himself upon the arm of her chair. "I saw you last on Tuesday night."

Jasmine nodded, smiling scornfully.

"It was impossible for me to have a word with you privately."

"Oh, quite," she murmured, puffing furiously at her cigarette.

"You know it was," he continued; "but early the next morning I 'phoned and Clarice told me that you were out."

Jasmine raised her eyes to him.

"What time did you 'phone?" she asked, speaking in a very cold voice.

"At half-past ten."

"At half-past ten on Wednesday morning?"

"Yes."

A fleeting smile showed upon the girl's lips, and now she was watching him intently.

"Well," she asked, "what did you do then?"

"I hoped you would ring me when you came in, but you did not do so. At half-past five I 'phoned again, and left a message with Clarice that I had seats for a first night at the Criterion."

"Really!" she said, softly. "And again I took no notice, I suppose?"

"None whatever," Carey replied. "At eight o'clock I despaired and gave the seats away. I thought at least you might have let me know if you had another engagement, and, naturally, I felt a little sore."

"Naturally," Jasmine murmured.

"So throughout the following day I did nothing. But on Friday, as I could not understand your silence, I telephoned again at four in the afternoon. You were out, but I left a message with Clarice requesting you to ring me directly you came in, and saying that the matter was urgent. You did not do so. Jasmine, I became perfectly wretched—because I could not imagine what I had done to offend you; and on Saturday morning I wrote you a note and sent it around to you personally by Ecko. He returned, saying that you were out, but that he had left the note with Ford. You have never answered it. Jasmine"—he bent over her—"tell me why? What have I done?"

He tried to take her hand, but she thrust him aside and, springing up, stood looking at him with such an expression of scorn upon her flushed face that his courage deserted him and, although innocent of offence, he knew all the mortification of discovered guilt. She threw her cigarette into the hearth, then turned and faced him again.

"I trusted you," she said in a low voice. "I thought you were different from the silly bunch of people I generally go about with. I admired your cleverness, I—I liked you. Now, to crown everything, you stand here in my room and tell me lies—deliberate lies."

"Jasmine!"

Carey felt that he had turned pale. But now the

mask of scorn was gone and the girl's delicate lips twitched.

"Oh, don't pretend!" she cried pathetically. "It makes it so much harder." She raised her hand. "No, don't say anything. Just wait a moment; I want to ask Clarice a question."

She crossed the room and pressed a bell.

"But listen to me," Carey began in a curiously suppressed voice.

Standing with her back to him:

"Wait," Jasmine implored, "please wait."

There was a rap on the door, and Clarice, Jasmine's maid, entered: a healthy-looking Jersey girl with a freckled complexion, ingenuous to the point of absurdity. She smiled in undoubted welcome upon finding Carey in the room; but:

"Clarice," said Jasmine, sharply, "why did you forget to tell me that Mr. Carey had telephoned?"

"Telephoned, Miss Jasmine?" The girl's eyes opened roundly as saucers. "Not all this week, unless Mr. Ford spoke to him."

"Oh, yes," Jasmine nodded coolly. "Of course it would be Ford who answered the telephone. Get my bath ready in ten minutes, Clarice."

Looking vaguely bewildered, the girl went out, and as the door closed, Jasmine turned to Carey.

"So much for your telephoning," she said. "You might easily have made a better excuse, Douglas. You know the house well enough to be fully aware that Ford, and not Clarice, would have answered the telephone. And now for your note."

She crossed to an intimate little lacquer bureau,

opened it, and from a pigeon-hole took out a yellow envelope, which Carey immediately recognized as one of his own. Without a word, she turned and handed it to him.

"There is your note," she added quietly.

Carey, conscious of a growing wonder and alarm, glanced at the address in his own handwriting—looked quickly at the girl who was watching him with an expression so strange that he found himself unable to classify it—and then pulled out the contents of the envelope: a perfectly blank sheet of his own notepaper!

"A joke, no doubt," said Jasmine. "But I am afraid"—and again her lips twitched—"it didn't quite appeal to me."

Carey temporarily found himself at a loss for words. He stood stupidly looking from the envelope to the blank page and back again to the girl. Some cigarettes lay on a little saucer inside the bureau, and she took one almost mechanically and lighted it.

"It wasn't necessary to go to so much trouble, Douglas," she declared. "I have no right to criticize your actions or your friends. Madame Sabinov is obviously very fascinating and I suppose I should compliment you upon your conquest."

"Madame Sabinov!" Carey exclaimed, "but I——"

"I have told you that you owe me no explanation," Jasmine interrupted, "please don't offer one. You will only annoy me. I had heard from several sources that you had been seen about with her before last Tuesday night."

"It's a lie!" Carey cried, angrily, "an infernal lie! I had never seen her in my life before last Tuesday night."

Jasmine looked at him in such a way that he longed to fall upon his knees before her and plead forgiveness for these strange sins which he had not committed. Tears were trembling upon her lashes. He felt that he was going mad, or that all the world was joined in some strange conspiracy against him.

"On Tuesday afternoon, when you put me off for Bobby's party," she continued brokenly, "I knew. All that you have done since was so unnecessary." She controlled herself, clenched her hands, and, looking at him with blazing eyes:

"Surely," she cried, "when you came for me at the last moment, you didn't expect me to join you? Do you think you can make a convenience of me? Do you think I want you on sufferance?" She turned away, biting her lips. "I went with someone else," she continued in an unnatural voice, "and found you there—with her."

"Jasmine!"

Carey's voice had grown strangely husky, too. In three strides he was beside her, his arm about her shoulders.

"Go away!" she cried imperiously, stamped her foot, twisted free and flung apart from him, turning, pale-faced. "Please go away. I don't want to say any more about it."

A knock sounded upon the door, and:

"Your bath is ready, Miss Jasmine," the voice of Clarice announced.

Jasmine walked resolutely across.

"Very well, Clarice," she called. "I am coming."

She opened the door, turned, and:

"You know your way out, Douglas," she said "Good-bye."

CHAPTER IV

MADAME SABINOV

MADAME SABINOV lay prone upon a divan, white elbows buried in the cushions, chin resting in upturned palms. Her glance strayed idly about the singular apartment; and she smiled as if in mockery of her exotic surroundings.

Certainly it was a fantastic, an extravagant room. The floor was of delicate mosaic, reconstructed from Carthaginian fragments, from those fragments which in unskilful hands crumble to dust as soon as their beauty is revealed, and almost in the moment when the protecting mantle of the desert is stripped from them. In the depths of a marble pond shimmering golden fishes passed like streaks of fire, above its placid surface leapt a faun clutching a straining nymph. She held to her bosom a lotus flower, and from its petals slender threads of water fountained out, descending in streams of diamonds to the pool of the golden carp.

The centre of the roof was a turquoise dome diffusing an artificial Eastern moonlight. Chinese tapestry masked the rest of the ceiling, being draped, tentwise, from the margin of the dome to the four walls. The latter were of flat gold with arabesques in relief, rising above a dado inlaid irregularly with soft mother-o'-pearl and the midnight blue of lapis lazuli, with ruby reds

like stains of blood and harsh outstanding splashes of absinthe-green; rarer specks of violet there were, purely coloured as that lost lacquer of Old Japan. In deep recesses, Byzantine fashion, chryselephantine statuettes gleamed amid purple shadows.

There were skins of beasts, yellow and black, strewing the floor; rugs from Ispahan, Shiraz, and the subtle looms of China. Four tenuous pillars of gold supported the dome, ascending spirally, like fanned flames, from the edge of the pool to the moonlight vault. In a jewelled tripod, on a fire of charcoal, burned little blocks of perfume composed of juniper berries, galangal root, black grapes, and sap of Nile rushes soaked in red wine and stiffened to a paste with mastic, myrrh, and the deadly honey of Trebizond.

Through the burner's perforated lid slender pencils of smoke bore waveringly upward the fragrance of a magical past; of an incense once sacred to Isis—a perfume of power competent to play strange tricks with the reason.

It was a fantastic, an extravagant room, a casket for passion or laughter—the cruel laughter of Arabian legend; and indeed it was no less than a reproduction of an apartment in the *harêm* of the bloodiest tyrant who ever ruled Baghdad as "Commander of the Faithful."

Only a woman of unusual beauty could have triumphed in such a setting; yet the ultimate note of this sensuous scheme was struck by the figure of Madame Sabinov. The cushions on which she lay were set in a low divan. This was panelled with sandalwood curiously carved. It possessed four posts each crowned with a miniature peacock fashioned of semi-precious

stones. Madame was wrapped in a single garment of some fleecy material resembling swansdown, which completely concealed her shape. Her hair, which was dressed in the fashion of the dancing girls who pose for ever upon the Egyptian monuments, and which is preserved in life to this day by the *ghawâzi* of Keneh, rendered her conspicuous wherever she appeared; for it was as white as virgin snow. This singularity was reputed to be due not to nature but to the art of a famous Parisian beauty specialist. *Sans doute*, it was vastly becoming, and in Paris had created a vogue. It lent an effect of dazzling youth to Madame's piquant beauty for the reason that it so palpably was not due to age. Her eyes appeared even more lustrous, her delicate colouring assumed an added delicacy, because of it.

Now she stirred languidly, and finally sat upright, raising her slender arms over her head, and seeming to resent some duty which must be performed. The fleecy garment extended nearly to her feet, upon which she wore sandals clasped about her ankles by emerald buckles. She looked around her and laughed contemptuously, as a clever actress weary of a farcical part. Then she became silent; a haunted expression stole into those beautiful eyes in which some men had found rapture, others sadness, and others again ravenous cruelty. In this moment of awakening, another woman looked out almost timidly, surely a stranger to every one of the many who had courted the lovely Madame Sabinov.

Quickly the mask was resumed, and Madame clapped her hands sharply together. A curtain of black and gold draped in a pointed doorway was drawn aside, and two little Nubian girls ran in, standing right and left of

the door, like twin ebony statuettes, and each holding back a corner of the curtain, which was divided in the centre. Their immature black shapes were innocent of clothing.

Madame rose languidly, a slender, mysterious figure, and, silent in her thin sandals, moved toward the pointed doorway.

* * *

Almost at the same moment a Farman car came throbbing impressively past Albert Gate. It had the powerful, destroyer-like lines which distinguish these French monsters of the road; it was coloured an unusual shade of electric blue and possessed a low-pitched limousine back. It might have reminded one of a strange and formidable beetle as it swung to the left, slowed, and halted before a large, old-fashioned mansion. The street was deserted at the time and curiously still, except for the mournful howling of a dog in some neighbouring house. A footman seated beside the chauffeur leapt down and opened the door of the car.

A man alighted wearing a French cape with a deep velvet collar, the cape fastened by an antique clasp. Apparently he was otherwise in correct evening dress, except that in lieu of the conventional silk hat he wore a soft black sombrero. An ivory cane was suspended by a loop from his wrist. He stood for a moment looking up at the house, and the light of a street lamp shone down upon a face notable for its pallor—but not alone for this.

The visitor, whilst of no more than average height, possessed a depth of chest and span of shoulders elo-

quent of physical strength. His feet, however, were daintily small and his hands unexpectedly slender. His hair, which had been permitted to grow so low upon the cheekbones as narrowly to escape classification as whiskers, was crisply curly and of a dull red colour. When, presently, he removed his hat, his head, covered with close, tense curls and set upon a powerful neck, resembled the head of Nero.

His footman, who wore an unusual and conspicuous uniform, having closed the door of the car, ran up the steps and rang the bell. Immediately, the door was opened—by invisible agency; for no servant appeared. The footman stood aside, bowing, and the visitor entered, the door closing behind him.

He found himself in a square lobby illuminated by a single silver mosque lamp swung from the ceiling, its many-coloured panes diffusing a dim religious light. A great bowl of red roses stood upon an Arab table, and the perfume of the flowers filled the air with sweetness. There was a low-set cushioned divan on the left, and upon the polished floor before it a deep red rug. Beyond, a staircase of black marble, having a finely wrought-iron balustrade, led up to a balcony where four globular lamps on silver pedestals cast down into the hallway a cold radiance like that of the moon.

To the right were cavernous shadows, in which, dimly perceptible, hung a purple curtain before an archway. Out from these shadows to greet the visitor came a white-clad Egyptian servant, who saluted him ceremoniously; and, speaking in Arabic:

"My lady requests you to wait and will not keep you long," he said.

Drawing the purple curtains aside, he disclosed a curiously furnished room; curious, because the few ornaments which it contained were unique objects of art such as at some time might have graced a palace, and curious because of its funereal appointments which were entirely of black and gold. The carpet was of unrelieved black, and the furniture of ebony; and the room derived light from a black standard lamp supporting an octagonal ebony frame in which were amber panels.

A heavy sweet perfume was perceptible, resembling that associated with Russian leather; and as the visitor entered, from a nest of yellow cushions a lithe shape leapt up. Warningly came a high, angry snarl, glittering of white fangs; and an African civet cat, around whose throat a gold collar was clasped, sprang to the carpet, turned, and snarling again fiercely at the intruder, merged, junglewise, into the shadows beyond the doorway.

The caller showed his small, even teeth in a cynical smile, glancing aside at the Egyptian servant. The latter did not speak, but, bowing low, retired.

For a moment, the newly arrived stranger paused, looking after him; then, turning, he unclasped his cape and threw it upon a chair with his hat and ivory cane. A virile, Neroian figure, he strode to the farther end of the room, and stood there watching the draped doorway. His glance was commanding, proprietorial. Upon his slender right hand, with which, ever and anon, he removed an ivory cigarette-holder from between his lips, gleamed a peculiar, talismanic ring.

CHAPTER V

THE DEAD MAN OF PARK LANE

THREE loud notes from a motor horn in the street below—an interval, and then two short notes brought Carey sharply to his feet. He had been lost in a miserable reverie, reviewing over and over again the mystery of the thing which had come between himself and Jasmine Hope. She could not have lied, he thought, and a hundred times during the evening he had glanced at the telephone upon his table, but pride had always checked his hand in the act of lifting the receiver.

Now, he ran quickly through to the outer room, and drawing aside the heavy curtains looked down into the street, his heart beating rapidly. It was two o'clock in the morning but the neighbouring club was still open and he had hoped that Jasmine, relenting, had called for him. In this anticipation a disappointment awaited him.

It was an A. C. car which stood below, so that for a moment he thought that his dream had come true. Then, the occupant, a man, seeing the light at the window above, vaulted briskly out and waved his hand. It was Muir Torrington, a physician who lived in George Street and who had been at school with Carey. Although falling short of his hopes, the visit was a welcome one, and

Carey closed the curtains again and went downstairs to admit his friend, a tall, sandy-haired young Scotsman, endowed with a physical restlessness which indicated superabundant vitality, and characterized by a forceful freedom of address quite peculiarly his own.

"Saw your light," Torrington explained, "and ventured to intrude, my lad. I haven't interrupted you, have I?"

"Not at all," Carey declared heartily, drawing his visitor into the hallway. "I was just trying to persuade myself that it was too early to go to bed, that's all. Come up and have a drink."

"What I called for," Torrington murmured.

And so presently the young M. B. was ensconced in the big rest chair, a whisky and soda on the coffee-table beside him; and having sampled the drink appreciatively, he began to load his pipe, staring the while at Carey with an odd expression in his grey eyes. He was palpably preoccupied. They had spoken but little thus far, as is often the way of old friends, but now:

"I needed that drink," Torrington declared.

"You're welcome," said Carey. "Where have you been—to a late case?"

The other nodded, reaching a long arm upward to the mantelpiece and groping there for matches.

"Damn funny case, too," he murmured. "Have you met this bird of gay plumage who is making such a stir about town, the chap who calls himself M. de Trepniak?"

Carey started, and:

"Yes," he replied, shortly. "I don't like him."

"Don't blame you," Torrington muttered between

clenched teeth, as he began to light his pipe. "I had never met him until to-night." He tossed the match into the hearth. "And I had no idea where he lived."

"I don't know where he lives," said Carey, with some curiosity.

"He lives in Park Lane. He has taken that funny castellated place which had been vacant for so long. You know the house I mean? It's crowned by a sort of small tower, like a young observatory."

"I know," Carey replied. "Every agent in London had tried to let it, I believe."

"Well, one of them has evidently succeeded," said Torrington; "de Trepniak lives there now, my lad. And, by Jove!"—he whistled—"money is evidently no object. It is decorated like a Hollywood studio set."

"Is Trepniak ill?" Carey asked.

Torrington nodded vigorously, staring in a perplexed fashion.

"Yes. His butler, or rather an extraordinary person who looked like the chief eunuch of the Shah of Persia, or a missing bit of the Russian Ballet, 'phoned for me about half an hour ago. How he found me, God knows! But probably he could get none of the other men to turn out. I had only just come home from another case, as a matter of fact, and the car was ready so off I went."

He paused, and smoked in silence for a while; but even in his moments of silence Muir Torrington conveyed no sense of repose. Carey watched his friend curiously, waiting for him to continue.

"I don't know how well you know him," Torrington

went on, in his rapid, vigorous fashion: "but have you ever taken a good look at him—a *really* good look, I mean?"

"No," the other returned, shortly. "I make a point of avoiding him."

"I think you are very wise," Torrington declared.

He suddenly stood up and began to pace the room, a restless, forceful figure, taking enormously long strides. Then presently he paused, right in front of Carey, and:

"Carey," he said, "Carey, my lad—in the first place I don't know what was the matter with the chap; I had never seen a man in quite the same condition; and in the second place——" He stopped as if at a loss for words, walked away, walked back again, but finally: "And in the second place," he repeated, "there's something unnatural about him."

"Unnatural?" Carey echoed.

"That's the word, unnatural. I know this is most unprofessional, but *you* don't count. His skin, for instance. I don't suppose you have ever examined his skin?"

"No, I have not, and I don't want to."

"No, of course, you wouldn't," Torrington murmured. "But from a physiological point of view, it is extraordinarily interesting."

Carey's perplexity was evident. "He has a very pale skin, hasn't he?" he asked. "Some women seem to find him fascinating."

"Damn it! He *is* fascinating!" Torrington cried. "But in the same way that a purple rattlesnake would be fascinating—or a new kind of poisonous spider. You see, Carey, I wasn't quite referring to the *colour*

of his skin, but to its *quality*. Hell!"—he rested his elbow on the mantelpiece—"it's unnatural with that hair. But I suppose it would be difficult to make my point clear to you; it's by way of being rather a technical one."

"But what was the matter with Trepniak?" Carey urged.

"Ah!" Torrington continued his promenade. "That's the point! What *was* the matter with him? My dear fellow!"—he turned, and speaking from the outer room—"I have no more idea than the man in the moon what was the matter with him!" He began to walk back. "As I followed the chief eunuch upstairs and through some of the most singularly appointed rooms I had ever seen in my life, I got a vague impression that there were numbers of people in the house—watching, but concealed. I never actually saw any one, you understand."

"You mean other servants?" Carey suggested.

Torrington shook his head sharply, and sat down.

"Other servants, possibly, but I thought I heard odd sounds—unpleasant in some way. Really, Carey, on some pretext you must get into that house; damn it, you must! I don't know if Trepniak entertains much. Imagine illustrations by Sidney Sime of some of the worst nightmares of Edgar Allan Poe. Well, it is like that. Finally, my guide, who was literally chattering with fright, paused before a door in a really delightful library—I mean, a well-appointed, sane library, containing, or so I gathered in a rapid glance around, some examples of the bookbinder's art, which would probably fetch a small fortune at Christie's. When I say he

stopped before a door, Carey, I am not perhaps being quite accurate."

Torrington resumed his restless promenade, speaking as he walked.

"It was really a sort of secret panel, and, when closed, no doubt would have defied detection, had one not known where to look for it. It was slightly ajar, though, and a tiny green lamp, set in a recess of the wall above it, looked just like the eye of a concealed animal. My guide pointed to the door and then to the light. His English was rather complex (he is some kind of gorgeous hybrid, probably with Greek in his make-up) but he gave me to understand that I should go in, but that he could not do so.

"Naturally enough, I asked, 'Why?' and paused on the threshold. His teeth began to chatter again at once. No one was allowed in the room beyond, I gathered, unless a certain bell rang and this lamp became lighted. At the same time, the door would automatically open a little way, and the duty then devolved upon this ornamental laddie to go and see what was the matter. Nothing of the kind had ever happened before, apparently during his term of office; and to cut a long story short, he was dead afraid to go in, but reported that he could get no answer from his master, although he knew him to be inside.

"Of course I pushed the door open and walked in, leaving the Russian Ballet in the library. I found myself in a room about the size of your study here; and I immediately became aware of two things: First, that this room revealed the real Trepniak, and that the rest of the house was mere shop window—for what purpose

assumed, I could not imagine. Second——" Suddenly he paused in front of Carey, staring down at him, and smoking furiously. "Carey"—he spoke now slowly and impressively—"Carey, my lad, I sympathized with the chief eunuch. I had never in all my life wanted to bolt from anywhere as I wanted to bolt from that room!"

"Bolt!" Carey echoed, startled out of himself by his friend's manner.

"Exactly. Bolt! Don't ask me why, because I can't tell you. It wasn't mere squeamishness. I've seen vivisection before, and on a larger scale."

"Vivisection?" Carey whispered.

Torrington nodded.

"You see," he continued, "the place was indescribably untidy—oh, in comparison, *my* study is a model of neatness!—And it simply bulged with books of a scientific character. All sorts of apparatus littered the floor, the shelves, the chairs, everywhere. On a glass table in one corner a big quarto volume lay open. It was a work in German by the late Professor Hadrian von Gühl. You probably never heard of him?"

Carey shook his head.

"No," Torrington murmured, "but the name of Gühl is one to conjure with in my trade. The greatest pathologist of his generation, my lad, or of any other generation. He died in Leipzig in the second year of the war, at an advanced age: he was well over eighty. Three of his works are classics. This one, open on Trepniak's table, I had never seen before, but it was covered with marginal notes, possibly in the Professor's hand; and fastened down upon a slab was a small lizard, which Trepniak had been engaged in dissecting."

"Alive?"

"Yes, alive, but not conscious."

"My God!"

Carey reached for the decanter and poured out a stiff peg. He offered to perform the same office for Torrington, but the latter waved his hand and continued to speak.

"Trepniak," he continued, "was seated at the table, a lancet held in his right hand, whilst his left rested upon a bell push, by means of which he had evidently given the alarm. He wore an overall, above which I could see a dress collar and a white tie—and he was rigid."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," Torrington repeated, grimly, "that he was rigid—like a man of stone—I couldn't move him. His eyes were open and staring straight before him. Carey"—he bent forward, looking into the other's face—"that man was *dead!*"

"Dead!"

"Dead, I tell you, if ever I saw a dead man! No respiration, no heart action—not a tremor. As I stood up, after a rapid examination, I should have been prepared to stake my reputation on it. His skin, Carey! How can I make you understand the phenomenon of the man's skin. It so intrigued me that I examined it through a lens which he had been using. Listen. I think I can make myself clear in this way. There is not a particle of hair, or even down, upon his face and arms!"

Carey looked puzzled. "In this respect, then, Trepniak resembles a woman?" he suggested.

"Damn it!" cried Torrington, "in this respect he does *not* resemble a woman!" He shot out a pointing

finger. "Produce a woman whose face, neck, and arms prove to be completely devoid of hair when examined through a powerful lens, and I will forfeit my income for a month!"

"Well"—Carey hesitated—"of course, I am rather out of my depth, but what about the albinos?"

"In *leucosis*," Torrington shouted, "hair is present but colourless. Trepniak has the skin of an albino but no hair at all! Therefore"—he suddenly dropped his voice, and, resting one hand on the table, bent down close to Carey—"there is something more than ever phenomenal in the fact that his head is covered with close, tight, auburn curls!"

And now, even to the comparatively unscientific mind of Carey, recognition of this curious fact bore something of horror, and, strangely, of uncleanness.

"But," he reverted, "you told me that Trepniak was dead."

"Ha!" Torrington uttered a short, mirthless laugh. "Never jump to conclusions, my lad. Sometimes, if you've jumped to a wrong one, you may find it damned hard to jump back. He *was* dead—dead according to all the known laws. I was so satisfied of this that I found myself wondering about that fixed stare. He was staring, Carey, at the door of some inner room. Wondering if the explanation of the mystery lay there, I moved around the table toward it—a ponderous thing, like the door of a strong room. It was ajar, as the outer door had been, and I grasped the handle with the idea of opening it fully. The place beyond was quite dark. Well"—he resumed his restless march—"I got no farther than that. I couldn't."

"You mean," said Carey in a puzzled fashion, "that the door wouldn't open?"

"Oh, no! The door opened easily enough. I have an idea it communicated with a stair leading up to the little observatory place on the roof. I became aware of a sort of tremor, as of machinery in motion, and I think I detected a faint humming sound. But something—funk, if you like, or perhaps discretion—simply checked me on the threshold!"

"You mean that you were afraid to go any farther?"

"I do, Carey! I admit it: I *dared* not go any farther! I turned, intending to instruct the native butler to advise the police—and——" Torrington walked right to the other end of the room and back again; then: "Trepniak," he continued very quietly, "had come to life!"

"Come to life!" Carey's voice echoed, in an incredulous whisper.

"He was moving, and uttering inarticulate cries. His eyes rolled in their sockets, and suddenly he stood up, uttering a piercing scream. Phew!"

Torrington paused, stooped, and helped himself to whisky and soda.

"You remember when I was up at Edinburgh," he went on. "I used to doubt if ever I should capture 'the professional manner'? Well, I have managed it, Carey, for I successfully assumed it to-night, round there in Park Lane—my heart beating like a hammer—facing that dead man come to life. Trepniak began to babble in some language I had never heard spoken before—it was not European—staring right through me at the door which I had meant to open. Then he said

something in German. His manner was that of a medium under control. At last the light of sanity returned to his eyes. He looked about him, stared at me, then fell back in his chair—and I achieved the professional manner. 'Sit quite still,' I said to him, 'and don't excite yourself. You are all right now.'

"'Who are you?' he mumbled. 'What are you doing here?'

"'I am Dr. Muir Torrington, and I was called in by your servant. You have been ill, but you are better.'

"He looked at me for a moment, Carey, as if he contemplated an assault. Then, groaning, he recovered entire possession of himself. He forced a really poisonous smile, and asked me an extraordinary question."

"What was it?"

"He said, 'when did you leave Egypt?'"

"But you have never been in Egypt!"

"I told him so; and he looked as though he found my assurance hard to accept. But finally he seemed to realize that I was speaking the truth; and if I had granted him a new lease of life he could not have appeared more gratified. Hell!"

He threw himself into the rest chair, and both men were silent for a few moments, then:

"Did he offer any explanation?" Carey asked.

Torrington nodded.

"Yes, an absurd one. He told me that he suffered from an hereditary tendency to catalepsy! Then he glanced at the lizard (which, by the way, I had put out of its misery) and apologized for the nature of his private studies. He assured me that the attack would probably not occur again for years; in short, made it

crystal clear that his highest ambition at the moment was to get rid of me.

"Well, I was not sorry to humour him, and never having felt so much need of human companionship for years, I was delighted to find you up. Because to-night I have been face to face with things which have shown me how little I know. With all my high-sounding degrees, old lad, I recognize that I am a child. Round there, in that house in Park Lane, I have seen the accepted laws of the schools set at defiance. Who *is* Trepniak?—or, rather, *what* is he? Carey"—he suddenly got upon his feet again—"that man was dead to-night—*dead;* yet, now, he is alive!"

CHAPTER VI

A LUNCHEON

"BUT do you mean, Daddy," asked Jasmine, "that I am not to go to Switzerland with the Mersons?"

"I do," her father returned gravely.

The girl looked at him with more than a hint of rebellion in her eyes.

"Did you ask me to meet you at the Ritz for lunch," she enquired in a plaintive tone, "just to play horrid parent?"

Sir Provost smiled indulgently. He was convinced that some hidden danger threatened Jasmine. She was modern, without having achieved a burlesque of that femininity which was her heritage; nor had he sought, hitherto, to check her independence. Somewhere, in the maze of her social interests, lay the clue to a mystery which, as daily became more evident, demanded solution. Yet Sir Provost hesitated to employ those powers of mental dissection which had placed him at the head of his chosen branch of therapeutics. Since the happiness of his daughter was concerned, he might reasonably have turned the strange searchlight of hypnotism upon her brain, conscious and subconscious, and thus, perhaps, have come upon a clue. But he was oddly reluctant.

"I want you to accept your aunt's invitation," he replied, "for a very particular reason."

"But," the girl protested, looking about her des-

perately, as if in quest of some friend amid the lunching throng, "I believe you *asked* Aunt Phil to send the invitation!"

"All the more reason why you should accept it, dear," continued Sir Provost. "Oh, it won't be so dull. They're in the throes of an election. You will be able to convass for the Conservative ex-member!"

"I won't," said Jasmine, mockly rebellious. "I shall take up the cause of Labour!"

"Good!" Sir Provost laughed. "As there is no Labour candidate, you will have to seek election in person! But"—he grew suddenly serious—"you will go, dear, won't you? Believe me, there is a reason."

"I hate being reasonable!" muttered the girl. "You don't mean that I am to go in the morning?"

"But I do," Sir Provost declared. "You can go down by road. I am having Talbot ready to start at ten o'clock. Is that too early for you?"

"Too early by days and days!" Jasmine assured him. "My dear Daddy, I am fully booked up right to the end of the week. Oh——" She leaned forward and caressed his hand, which rested upon the table. "Make it next Monday morning, and I will really, really go down for a few days to Aunt Phil"—she paused—"if you want me to"—another pause; "although I cannot imagine why you should."

And now, her father, keenly watching her, detected a swift change of expression, and this, he knew, corresponded to some thought conjured up by her reference to the end of the week.

"I should guess," he said, smiling, "that you have an engagement with Douglas Carey on Saturday."

Jasmine pressed her lips tightly together, looking aside, and:

"I *had*," she admitted. "We were to have dined at the Carlton and gone to His Majesty's and from there to the Grafton. But——"

"Well," Sir Provost prompted, deliberately misunderstanding, "is it because I ask you to cancel this engagement that you are so loth to go to Surrey?"

Jasmine shook her head scornfully.

"I had already cancelled it," she replied. "I never want to see Douglas Carey again."

"Really!"

Her father spoke lightly, hoping to provoke her into further confidences. "I thought you were great friends?"

"So we were," Jasmine admitted. "But when I catch a man telling deliberate lies—really, I lose all interest in him."

"And did Carey tell you deliberate lies?"

"Yes." Jasmine bit her lip, and looking aimlessly down at the table, rolled a crumb upon the cloth—"which wasn't in the least necessary, because, naturally, he is at liberty to choose his own friends."

"Ah," Sir Provost murmured. He had learned more than he had hoped to learn. "You mean about Madame Sabinov?"

Jasmine looked startled; and:

"I didn't know you knew her, Daddy," she said.

"I don't," Sir Provost replied. "But she has a professional appointment with me at three this afternoon. So that you see I am to make her acquaintance within the next hour."

"But, about Douglas," Jasmine continued, watching him closely—"you have heard about them, too, then?"

"I have heard," replied Sir Provost, speaking very deliberately, "that Carey met Madame Sabinov at a supper party recently—that he had never seen her before and has never seen her since."

"It isn't true," Jasmine declared quietly.

And as she spoke, one watching Sir Provost, who had known the man, must have realized that he deemed her words more weighty than they seemed. That searching professional look came into his eyes, and he studied her, as she sat, glance averted, looking very miserable. It was not because, unwittingly, she was revealing her interest in Douglas Carey that he regarded her in this fashion. There was another reason. He knew that, at last, he was almost within reaching distance of a link in the chain. Strange influences were at work, influences subtle but far-reaching.

Sir Provost regarded Muir Torrington as one of the young men of his profession who counted, and from Muir Torrington he had learned the story of the 'phone messages which were never received—and of the note which on delivery had proved to be a sheet of blank paper. He had learned more than this; and he was of those who count prevention better than cure.

"You may realize one day, Jasmine," he said gravely "that you misjudge Carey."

"You don't know him!" the girl returned bitterly. "Oh, he's full of blarney!—that was why he came to see you so early in the morning!"

"On the contrary," her father replied, "he came to see me professionally."

"But, Daddy," Jasmine exclaimed, regarding him with wide-open eyes which mirrored a sudden concern, "but—he is not ill?"

"No, no," Sir Provost assured her, "he is not ill. He is merely the victim of a powerful enemy."

"Oh! Daddy, what do you mean?"

The mood of rebellion was gone, and Jasmine spoke almost fearfully.

"I mean," her father returned, grasping her hand reassuringly, "that you must cancel all the rest of your appointments for this week and go down to Aunt Phil. I don't want to exile you, dear, and I don't think you need remain for more than a few days; but if I assure you that I have very grave reasons for asking you to go, I know you won't refuse. Will you?"

"Why, if you ask me like that, how can I? But"—her charming face grew troubled—"if I have been misjudging Douglas——" She hesitated. "Really, it doesn't seem possible. He told me three deliberate falsehoods. Oh, please"—she laid her hand again caressingly on her father's arm—"if there is another explanation, won't you tell me what it is?"

Sir Provost gently patted the slender hand resting on his sleeve.

"Except that I know you have misjudged him, there is nothing that I can explain now," he replied; "and this is one of the reasons why I wish you to go down to Surrey for a while. You will be in touch by telephone, and as soon as I have anything to report you shall hear from me."

She raised her eyes wistfully.

"It can't be because of Douglas that you are sending

me away," she said. "Must I be treated like a little girl? Can't you tell me the truth?"

Sir Provost shook his head slowly; then:

"I don't know the truth, myself," he answered. "I only know that there is something strange, something abnormal, actively at work just now, and I feel that you are likely to become involved in it, if you are not involved in it already. I can say no more, dear, at present, except to ask you to take particular care of yourself. Are you dining out to-night?"

"I was, but I won't!"

"Good! Then we can chat again over dinner. You have an appointment with your hairdresser in Conduit Street. Let me drop you there, then I shall just have time to keep my engagement with Madame Sabinov."

CHAPTER VII

IN HALF-MOON STREET

IT WAS Sir Provost Hope's custom to arrange his consulting day in two sessions. His last appointment in the first session was made for one o'clock, enabling him to lunch at half-past; his first in the second session was at three; and, to-day, the patient whose name stood against the time, three o'clock, was Madame Sabinov.

Sir Provost Hope had achieved his unique place as a consultant chiefly by sheer brilliancy. The popularity of that form of diagnosis vaguely labelled "Psychoanalysis" had afforded him his big opportunity, and he had seized it with an assurance characteristic of the man.

A member of an old and respected family, he had never neglected the professional asset afforded by his right of entry into good society. Nevertheless, his title had been well merited. In that strange domain of the mind and spirit which science has recently reopened, he had explored at least as deeply as any man of his generation. He had carried the art of "healing suggestion" certainly one step beyond his rivals, and had accomplished cures which had defied, alike, the nostrum of the physician and the knife of the surgeon.

The early death of his beautiful wife had done much

to direct his studies into psychic channels, and outside the varied aspects of his life's work there was but one passion which claimed him: his love for his daughter, in whom he recognized an almost uncanny reproduction of her mother.

Time is kindly, though some count him an enemy, and Provost Hope had learned to love the little mannerisms, quaint humours, and odd flashes of intuition in Jasmine, which once must have wounded his heart, since they awoke deathless memories of the woman who had died in giving life to this dainty and elusive counterpart of herself.

That Jasmine loved Douglas Carey, Sir Provost had known for a long time. He had accordingly cultivated Carey's society and had not been slow to recognize a man of fine capacity and absolute integrity. Valuing Carey merely upon his achievements in the literary field, he had gone far. It had not diminished Sir Provost's esteem to learn that there was another aspect of his activities. Carey's scrupulous silence, prior to that fateful consultation, respecting his important government work, had raised him even higher in the estimation of the older man.

Apart from his interest in the patient, the case itself had been unique. Hypnotic interference was clearly indicated. That the interest of Carey's unknown enemy might be personal as well as criminal was a point which had not occurred to Sir Provost at the time. To Muir Torrington he owed the new clue; for in this mysterious parenthesis designed to separate Carey from Jasmine he recognized at once the personal motive, and the same, or a similar, type of intrusion.

In other words, the Unknown Quantity interested in stealing from Carey's brain secrets which belonged to the British Government was also interested in Jasmine.

Sir Provost, as his professional record had shown, was far too clever to be old-fashioned. In his daughter he perceived a typical product of the day; and he had permitted her to develop more or less along certain lines because, in despite of habits which must have shocked an earlier generation, he knew her proud spirit and could trust it—or such was his philosophy.

To seek to link the two clues which had fallen into his hands was a task of extraordinary difficulty, for the reason that, so far as his observation had led him, Jasmine apparently knew everyone of note in London. Without in any way violating his passionate paternal love for the girl, he nevertheless regarded her as an item in a fascinating experiment; and his determination to isolate her was prompted by motives at once protective and scientific. At Low Ketley, his sister's place in Surrey, he could conveniently check Jasmine's visitors. Whilst she lived her butterfly life in London it was impossible for the specialist to scrutinize her many friends.

Having dropped his daughter in Conduit Street, Sir Provost lay back on the cushions of his car and closed his eyes, reflectively.

A potential link in the chain had come his way, uninvited—and he wondered. He had not seen Douglas Carey since the consultation, but he appreciated Carey's silence. Carey, as he had learned from Muir Torrington, had quarrelled with Jasmine: pride forbade him to see Jasmine's father, even professionally.

Sir Provost understood and sympathized. Nevertheless, he would have liked to know in what degree his diagnosis had been correct; for he had traced the disturbance of which Carey complained to one of two unfamiliar objects on his writing table—the Korean bowl and the figure of the contemplative Buddha. The latter, Carey suspected, had been left in his room by Madame Sabinov. Sir Provost did not question the facts of the story. He had unusual means of judging a man's probity. Therefore, Madame Sabinov might possibly be a link between Carey and the Unknown Quantity. Sitting with closed eyes, he reviewed the few particulars which he had accumulated respecting this woman.

During the comparatively short time that she had been in London, she had contrived to make herself notorious. "Of course, one has heard of Madame Sabinov." A world of significance had lain in the words. Sir Provost recalled two cases in which his method of diagnosis had discovered Madame as the disturbing influence. He had never seen her, but already he had classified her as one of those strange beings whose worldly mission would seem to be to sow unhappiness and to reap disaster. She was a dangerous exotic, with whose name great names were scandalously linked, justly or unjustly. But he thought he knew the type, and he was gravely doubtful of the motive which had prompted Madame Sabinov to seek a professional interview. If she must be counted unfriendly, it looked like a false step. Sir Provost wondered. At any rate, he was well armed if the presence of this woman meant a move on the part of

the enemy—the mysterious enemy of Carey and of Jasmine.

As he stepped out of his car, Ford opened the door, and:

"Madame Sabinov is waiting, sir," he announced.

Sir Provost nodded and crossed the hall. Glancing at the clock, he noticed that the hour was exactly three. He removed his hat and topcoat and went into his consulting room. He scanned a long list of patients for the afternoon, then:

"I am ready, Ford," he said; and a moment later Madame Sabinov came in.

He had heard many tales concerning the fabulous luxury of her life, but he had noted no car at the door, and now as she entered he observed that she wore a well-tailored but simple walking suit. She was tall and elegant, a fashionable but unobtrusive figure; and for this simplicity he had not been prepared. Nor was her beauty quite of the type he had anticipated. Her remarkable hair was confined beneath a closely fitting hat, depriving her of a curious Delphic quality which belonged to the hidden whiteness. In her eyes he read a startling story of love and hate.

She had lived every hour of her life, this woman, perhaps too eagerly, but, he determined, once, at least, she had tasted the sweeter wine of self-sacrifice. Certainly, Madame Sabinov did not conform to the type which he had conjured up. Vanity was not her only god. She had made many offerings upon that altar, yes, but also upon others, and not always had her prayers been for gratifications of the body. She was more pitiful than he had thought to find her, and infinitely more dangerous.

As their glances met, the idea leapt to his mind: Was this the Unknown Quantity?

Something tauntingly familiar, yet wholly strange—in the dull ivory of her skin, the hint of gold in her long, slumbrous eyes—sent Sir Provost upon a mental instantaneous tour of the world, in quest of the real nationality of the woman who called herself Poppæa Sabinov. His memory lingered for a moment in a district of the Caucasus which he had once visited. But it yielded no definite clue. All this, the consultant, armed with his uncanny knowledge of humanity, had read from the physical appearance or defined from the aura of Madame Sabinov during the few seconds which elapsed whilst she crossed from the door to a chair which he had placed for her. Then:

"Will you please sit here," he said quietly, "and explain why you wish to consult me?"

Madame Sabinov slightly inclined her head, and sank into the chair with a graceful languor which again excited the doctor's interest. For some indefinable reason it struck him as being un-European. He seated himself beside his writing table, fixing a keen gaze upon his visitor.

"I have come to you," she replied, "because I am suffering from a sickness of the mind or the spirit rather than one of the body."

Sir Provost nodded. "So much I had gathered," he said gravely. "But tell me more particularly what distresses you."

She bent forward, her elbow on the arm of the chair, resting her chin in the palm of her hand, and watching him with strange, sombre eyes.

"I am a woman," she continued, "who in my youth knew what it was to submit to brute force—to have no will of my own. I have been a chattel; my mother was a slave."

"Do you mean this literally?" interrupted Sir Provost's gentle voice.

"I mean it literally, yes. So that when freedom came and I realized that at last I was at liberty to live my own life, I formed a resolution."

And now, carefully noting the modelling of her lips and chin, the doctor determined that what this woman willed to do she would carry out in the face of almost any odds. In other words, the life she had lived had been of her own choosing, and not, as is more often the case, the outcome of beauty allied to frailty.

"My resolution," she went on, "was this: I would never again suffer the domination of any man."

She shrugged her shoulders and smiled sadly.

"I had forgotten love," she added. "My training had taught me to believe it a myth. Yet it came to me, and for the two happiest years of my life I lost myself in someone else, gladly, utterly. It came to an end—that happiness." She hesitated. "And from the hour that it ended my resolution remained unbroken; until—in Paris I began to wonder; in London, I have definitely felt a change."

"Explain what you mean by a change."

"I mean that I am no longer entirely mistress of my own actions."

"Do you refer to some new interest, some affection which has come into your life?"

"Not at all." She spoke emphatically. "No such

thing has come or will ever come again. No." She shook her head. "I mean that some influence outside myself, outside my life, at times controls me."

"You speak of a mental control?"

"Of a mental control, yes."

"Have you no idea of its source?"

"None whatever," she declared. "My ignorance is perhaps due to vanity. Many men"—again she shrugged her shoulders—"flatter me. I have resources, and I suppose I am notorious." She raised her eyes naïvely. "Am I not?"

"Well"—Sir Provost tapped his tortoise-shell-rimmed glasses on the blotting-pad—"one has heard of you, Madame Sabinov."

She nodded and glanced aside.

"All you have heard is not true," she said, "but some of it is. Yes, I have lived my life. But what I have done I have chosen to do, and when I was tired"—she opened her hands in an odd little gesture—"I finished. But now——"

"Yes?" Sir Provost prompted.

"I feel"—the opened hands now became tightly clenched—"that I am being *used!*"

"Do you mean that you are being controlled by a will more powerful than your own?"

"Yes, and more than that. I believe there are times during the day and night when I perform actions not dictated by my own brain."

"Ah!" Sir Provost fixed his gaze keenly upon her again. "Do I understand you to refer to hypnotism?"

Madame Sabinov laughed incredulously, but, running as a black thread through the silver, one might have de-

tected a faint note of fear. She threw her head back, meeting the gaze of the strange blue eyes which watched her so intently, and:

"Is there such a thing?" she demanded.

"There is," Sir Provost answered simply.

"I suppose there is," murmured Madame Sabinov. Exerting a visible effort of will, she withdrew her glance from his and stared down at the point of her shoe with which she was restlessly tapping the carpet. "If I had not thought so I should not be here, of course."

Followed some moments of silence upon which Sir Provost did not intrude. Then:

"If someone has obtained such a control over me," she continued, speaking in a very low voice, "if, at times"—she laughed again, but not scornfully—"I have been 'possessed,' in the mediæval sense, there would be a record of my actions during such times upon my subconscious mind, would there not?"

"There would," Sir Provost replied.

"Although the conscious or positive brain, or whatever you call it, retained no memory of them?"

She looked up at him, and her expression had changed to one of appeal.

"I am afraid!" she said, and bent forward, clasping her hands tightly together. "If this thing is true, it means that there can be life—force—intelligence—separate from the body, independent of the senses. It surely means that part of us is not material—and therefore may not die when our bodies die. Oh! If I thought so, I should go mad. The way of my life, the pleasures I have schemed for, the liberties I have taken with conventions I despised! All of it—all of it—be-

cause of my blind belief that death ended everything. If it does not!" She raised her eyes to the ceiling, but seemed to contemplate some far-distant planet. "If it does not!"

A man less clever than Sir Provost Hope must have supposed Madame Sabinov to be the victim of a sudden, overwhelming dread of Divine punishment. Sir Provost, watching her, knew that this was not so; and his last doubt of her sincerity vanished. The motive—and always he sought the motive—which had driven this self-centred but passionate woman to consult him, was one which the psychologist understood. And presently her lips moved again and she spoke, in a mere whisper:

"What has *he* thought of me!"

When again Madame Sabinov sought his glance, her lashes were wet.

"I understand," he said gently. "You have realized that the will is the spirit. Because the will of another has commanded your obedience, when none other was present, you have realized that there are forces linked to the human body which, nevertheless, are untrammelled by it and which may outlive it."

Madame Sabinov bowed her head.

"I begin," she said, speaking in a strange, stifled voice, "to realize that there are laws of which I know nothing; and so—Oh! do you understand?—I dare not allow any one to gain such power over me! Never, never again! I must know who it is. Can you tell me who it is?"

"Possibly," Sir Provost replied. "But have you no hesitation in submitting to hypnotic treatment?"

"None."

"You realize that you are throwing open the book of your life to my scrutiny?"

"I came prepared to do so."

"Very well. It shall be as you wish."

CHAPTER VIII

THE BLUE FLAME

"MISS JASMINE is out of town, sir, and Sir Provost is not at home."

Perhaps, to some people, twelve midnight would seem a singular hour at which to make a social call, but to-day, it has been said with truth, nothing is singular except the old proprieties.

Douglas Carey murmured good-night to Ford and stood for a moment in Half-Moon Street contemplating the house. He had learned in these latter days to distrust the stability of the earth upon which he stood, to question the moon in the heavens, and to doubt his own identity.

The long silence of Jasmine had worn down his pride because love is stronger than pride. Believing, as he had told Muir Torrington, that he had telephoned and written to the house in Half-Moon Street, then learning that neither messages nor letter had, apparently, existed outside his own imagination, he had determined, since now the case was desperate, to call in person. This resolution had come at the end of a day such as he prayed he might never live through again.

At noon, he had dreamed of lunch at the Carlton, with Jasmine; at five o'clock, of tea in her own particular snuggery in Half-Moon Street; then, as dusk came,

of dinner at a wonderful little intimate restaurant "discovered" by Jasmine—with the vista of a wonderous evening in her company. He pictured her beside him at the theatre, and then at supper in the Embassy. His tortured spirit lived through the delicious intimacy of the drive home, when already heavy-booted night workers of London were about their toils, with rumbling carts and strange lights. Once again he had waited for the parting wave of the hand from her window, and had visualized his contented return to Bruton Street; the "night-cap," the final cigarette—and the last waking thought: Jasmine.

But Tantalus had known no blacker hell. And so, at midnight, he had set out, in pursuit of no definite plan but yet with a shadowy goal before him. He had not dared to admit to himself that he was bound for Sir Provost's house—perhaps to find it in darkness; or, worse, to meet with rebuff. Yet, he had followed a direct route—but on arrival had failed to recollect any landmark or fellow pedestrian upon the way. He had walked in a dream. And in his dream, as in those which had come to him throughout the day, he had seen Jasmine laughing gaily in the company of this man and that, and always in those resorts where he most desired to be with her.

The mere fact that the lobby was illuminated might alone not have provided enough encouragement, for he could detect no sign of light in any room; but a moving shadow of Ford upon the glass panels of the iron-scrolled doorway had given him the necessary courage to ring. He had accounted for his late call by saying that he had been passing; but, "Miss Jasmine is out of town, sir,"

the butler had replied, "and Sir Provost is not at home."

At that, the old reserve had swept back. He had burned to enquire where Jasmine was gone: his pride had forbidden the question. Vaguely he remembered having murmured, "Oh, of course, how forgetful of me, but I thought Sir Provost might be at home." Then the door had closed; the shadow of Ford had disappeared.

Now he was out in Half-Moon Street, looking up at the house. It was real enough. Yes, he actually stood in Half-Moon Street, and he was prepared to take oath that in *propriâ personâ* he had received a message from the lips of Ford. He moved slowly away in the direction of Piccadilly and paused on the corner, staring to right and left.

Visible through the window of a neighbouring club sat a man whom he knew fairly well—home on leave from India. Carey glanced up at him, and debated with himself. He had known Murchison for many years, although never intimately. But a desire to talk to someone, to any one, now possessed him urgently. He stood there, hesitating. Would Murchison understand? He was a hard-bitten Indian official. Yet, perhaps in the course of his duties he had come in contact with things outside the pale—things beyond the common understanding, unprovided for by Western laws. Carey started in the direction of the club entrance. At the foot of the steps he paused. It was impossible. He could not plunge into these intimate details of his private life with a man like Murchison, whom he saw only at intervals of a year or more.

However, the movement had set him on a western course, and he proceeded along Piccadilly in the direction of Hyde Park Corner, walking away from home, which he dreaded, because of the thoughts which loneliness must bring.

Every lighted car which passed him by seemed to contain a pair of happy lovers. Why, he wondered, were others so successful in their affairs, whilst he was so unfortunate? Piquant, flower-like faces nestling amid furry theatre cloaks; well-groomed, self-satisfied men; careless gaiety, untroubled by the sordid things of the world. It was a taunting panorama of youth and laughter, of an Arcady where sadness could gain no admittance.

Some pitiless magic glamoured the night. All these fairy captives seemed to be lovely—and loving. He despised his own futility. Had he ever felt thus sure of Jasmine? No! He had been a diffident lover, lacking the self-confidence to impose his superior egotism upon the spirit of the woman he desired. And now, she had left London, with never a parting word.

A belated flower-seller, a tired-eyed, gypsy-looking creature, intercepted him.

"Beautiful violets, sir? A bunch of violets for the lady."

Carey suppressed an angry retort and passed on; then, experiencing a sudden revulsion of feeling, he plunged his hand into his pocket, found a half-crown, and retracing his steps, overtook the weary woman.

"Here," he said, "I want no violets, thank you. Good-night."

He proceeded at a more rapid pace. The episode

had slightly changed his mood. He ceased to notice the lover-laden cars and other traffic of the busy highway, the pedestrians, respectable and dissolute, the cheerful windows of fashionable clubs.

The mystery of the Green Park claimed his attention. He contemplated a damp mist which overhung the little verdant valley beyond the iron railings; and, in spirit, penetrating the haze, he pursued a zigzag course along deserted pathways. There was the stuff of romance in this green oasis which held a royal palace amid the desert of London. Yet he had rarely entered it. How often he might have walked there, with Jasmine. He pulled up suddenly at the corner of Hamilton Place.

A policeman on duty regarded him with disfavour, and the attitude of this representative of the law brought Carey back to earth. He endeavoured to recall the phases of his walk from Half-Moon Street; but the effort was in vain. This mental hiatus disconcerted him. He turned into Hamilton Place, asking himself, "What have I done? What have I been thinking since I left Half-Moon Street?" It was intolerable, this self-distrust. He knew that it must cease; that he must regain command of his individuality—become again the captain of his soul.

Could it be that the whole maddening phase was a mirage created by his love for Jasmine Hope? This was hard to believe. Certainly, he had never known love before, a truth which daily, hourly, became more apparent; but surely love did not rob a man of his will. And now, swiftly, a new thought took shape. He was in Park Lane—and Trepniak lived in Park Lane.

What spirit, malignant or benign, had guided his steps there to-night? Chance? He doubted the power of this much-abused god.

Park Lane after midnight is unexpectedly deserted in so far as pedestrians are concerned. To Carey it presented a totally unfamiliar aspect. Occasional motor 'busses carrying a few sleepy passengers tore along at racing speed, together with a certain number of cars and taxicabs. He was in a curiously detached mood, and watched with interest the movements of a party of men strangely attired, wearing heavy-soled wading boots, and engaged in sluicing the Lane with a powerful fire-hose. He discovered something fascinating about that great jet of water, which glittered unreally in the light of the street lamps; and his imagination invested the scene with qualities of fantasy. But always he pressed on, with no conscious purpose; and the hiss of the cascade formed an accompaniment to a sort of chant in his brain: "*Trepniak lives in Park Lane—Trepniak lives in Park Lane.*"

On that night which had witnessed the death of his happiness, Jasmine had evaded him—but later had appeared with Trepniak. She had gone away—with Trepniak.

Heavens! How stupidly dense he had been! The truth—or what he believed to be the truth—burst upon him as a revelation. Jasmine had conceived an uncontrollable infatuation for this poseur, this adventurer! Her story of the messages, her production of a blank sheet of notepaper—these were artifices of a woman blinded to every moral obligation by a passion which had overwhelmed her!

Passing the gang of goblin workmen, whose movements were reflected in the glittering patch of roadway created by their labours, he crossed to the park side, pressing on, now, toward a definite objective. No omnibus was in sight, no cab, no car. On the pavement by the railings there was no other pedestrian. At an ever-quickening pace he walked on, and as he walked, counsels more sane and wholesome began to urge their claims. "Never jump to conclusions, my lad"—Torrington's words recurred to him, and he found the memory to be very soothing. Then, in sight of Grosvenor Gate, he pulled up sharply, and stood in a shadowed patch between lamps, watching an upstanding wing of a house beyond.

It was an oddly constructed building, which long enough had figured upon the books of more than one agent. Now, in the small, high openings of that tower-like superstructure a light appeared, fitfully rising and falling; a queer, electric-blue light, an elfin light, elusive but arresting.

Carey moved on more slowly, his gaze fixed upon this little tower. The house, which stood retired from the roadway, lay in shadow. No glimmer showed in any of its many windows. But there, above the roof proper, danced that subtle, lambent flame. At last he stood quite still and watched it fascinatedly.

His imagination took fire. Here, in Park Lane, was a modern Tower of Copernicus. This was Trepniak's house; yet, had it been the house of a stranger, he must have wondered no less keenly about the eerie light in the tower. Indeed, the strangeness of it swamped everything else temporarily, bringing a merciful for-

getfulness and permitting the man whose imaginative work was beginning to win recognition from two continents to triumph for a while.

There was something essentially *different* about this light; there was something *frightful* about it—something which touched him with awe: he knew that he looked upon a thing such as his eyes had never witnessed before. And whilst he stood there, held by its mystery, a musical voice spoke somewhere close beside him.

"No, Mr. Carey," said the voice, "you have never seen that light before. Few living men have seen it."

As the voice came, the light in the tower vanished. Carey, whose heart had seemed to miss a beat, turned, fists clenched, to face the speaker.

He found himself to be glaring at an aristocratic-looking Egyptian—or as an Egyptian he classified him—a man as tall as himself, but slenderly and delicately built, whose dress was European save for his scarlet *tarbûsh*, and whose long velvet eyes afforded Carey a sensation absolutely unique but not unpleasant.

The words, the look of those liquid dark eyes, deprived him of speech. Oblivious of his surroundings, enthralled, he watched this stranger, whose compelling gaze, which was not harsh but bewilderingly compassionate, seemed to isolate him from his fellowmen, until:

"Remember what you have seen," said the Egyptian, "but fear nothing. Evil only seems to triumph. Good must always prevail."

He bowed and passed on, going in the direction of Hyde Park Corner.

Carey stared after him—passing from light to shadow, shadow to light. That he stood in Park Lane, that a

Daimler car was approaching from the direction of Marble Arch and a motor 'bus from that of Hyde Park Corner, whilst a stolid policeman paced within twenty yards of him, counted for nothing. He only knew of a sudden overwhelming conviction that he had seen an evil thing, an unholy thing, and that he had had speech with one possessed of some terrifying power beyond the compass of common humanity.

He crossed and began to walk rapidly down Mount Street. He longed for companionship; for sympathy, understanding. His nerves were playing him tricks, but the urgency of his fears would not be denied.

Then, presently, like an echo, he heard the hurried footsteps of someone who pursued him!

"Carey!" cried a voice. "Carey!"

He turned. Muir Torrington was following.

"Carey!" he said, "you look as though you were running away from a ghost. What's the matter, man?"

"Thank God it is you!" was the reply. "Torrington, either I am going mad or to-night I saw something like a reflection of hell in the tower of Trepniak's house."

Torrington nodded sharply.

"You have seen the light?" he replied. "*I* saw it, too."

"What!" Carey cried, eagerly. "Then perhaps you saw the Egyptian who spoke to me?"

Torrington nodded again, and the rays from a street lamp shining down upon his face revealed an expression unlike any that his friend had seen there before.

"I did," he answered. "I saw him." He grasped Carey's arm. "Come along to my place. I want to talk to you."

CHAPTER IX

QUASIMODO

"MAKE yourself comfortable," said Muir Torrington, drawing up, beside the armchair in which he had placed Carey, a little table carrying decanter, siphon, and glasses. "Curtis will have turned in, of course, but I must just go and glance at the book. God knows whom I've missed or what I've missed by being out all night on this strange business. I sha'n't keep you many minutes."

He started with long strides for the door of the study, a gaunt, virile figure, then turned, and:

"Oh, by the way," he added, "these might amuse you until I come back."

He began hurriedly to inspect one of the many shelves. Finally, pulling out a pair of stout volumes and clapping them on the table beside Carey, he laughed, in sudden, boisterous good humour.

"You won't be able to make head or tail of them, my lad!" he declared; "but you remember my mentioning the reputation of Professor Hadrian von Gühl?"

"Yes," Carey replied.

"Well, these are two of his best works. Only three have been published in English. The third, and most celebrated, I lent to someone recently. But you will find two sufficient! I sha'n't be long."

He went out.

Carey, helping himself to whisky and soda, took a cigarette from a box upon the table, lighted it, and opened one of the volumes.

This he discovered to be a treatise upon obscure conditions of the pancreatic gland; and, having scanned half a dozen passages or so, and wondered whether his own duodenum chanced to be above reproach, he abandoned it in despair, turning to the second volume only to find himself lost again in a pathological maze. Here were singular diagrams and, to him, meaningless tables. He closed the book and lay back in his chair, looking around the room.

It was a room very characteristic of Muir Torrington. Some of the works on the shelves Carey remembered as having been in Torrington's possession in Edinburgh. The collection had been added to, however, and now was so extensive as to have outgrown the accommodation of the study. Untidy stacks of books lay upon the floor, and all sorts of odds and ends were spread about in the utmost disorder, suggesting that they had been thrown into the room. There were a few instruments, and ambiguous liquids in bottles, the whole place appearing to be systemless as a Limehouse junk-shop. Then, his approach advertised by a loud banging of doors, Muir Torrington returned, drawing furiously at a briar pipe which palpably had gone out.

"I had two very important engagements to-night," he explained, "but no doubt Curtis put things right for me. Ah!" He picked up the works of Hadrian von Gühl and returned them to their shelf. "How's the

pancreas? Fit? Good! To carry on where I left off."

He stopped, helped himself to a drink, and set out upon one of his restless promenades, now opening a book at random, closing it, and tossing the volume on a table or on the floor; now adjusting an ornament on the mantelshelf; and continuously striking matches which burned down to his fingers before being dropped and stamped underfoot.

"I wasn't content to let the thing rest, Carey. Mysteries are my vice. I found myself wondering about Trepniak. The figure of the man haunted me. So tonight, having been called out to a patient in the Marble Arch neighbourhood, I walked back along Park Lane trying to think of any reasonable excuse for calling. I was not 'dressed'—idiotic expression—but you know what I mean; I never dress unless I can't avoid it, and, as it happened, this was all to the good. Just as I passed Trepniak's place, walking very slowly, someone came out from the servants' quarters.

"There was no sign of life about the house, no light; and this individual came up from below, closed the gate, and *crept* out just ahead of me. When I say 'crept out,' I *mean* 'crept out,' Carey. No one else was passing at the moment, and although the man did not look at me—could not possibly have identified me again—I sensed the fact in some way that he had hoped to leave unnoticed."

Carey, closely watching the speaker, interrupted:

"Your description suggests a thief."

"No!" Muir Torrington was explosively emphatic. "He was as furtive as a midnight cat, and as anxious

to avoid observation. But this was no thief, Carey, my lad. It was something very different. At first sight of him I *knew* that he was something very different. You remember how that flickering light, up there in the tower, affected you to-night? You felt that it was out of the ordinary—in some way unique? Well, this was the aura of my man who crept out of the basement. He was unique. He conveyed an impression of deformity. He stooped—I could not swear that he was really crook-backed." He paused for a moment, striking yet another match. "No! I doubt if there was any true curvature; but the effect was that of a hunchback. I could not see his face. He wore a soft black hat, brim pulled down, Guy Fawkes fashion, with a dark overcoat—and he carried a hand-bag. But how can I make you realize the man! In some way, Carey——" Here Torrington took his unlighted pipe from between his teeth, and, leaning on the mantel, stared downward reflectively—"In some way he was perfectly abominable. Even when I could only see his stooping shoulders, he was revolting."

"But," Carey broke in, "this is difficult to follow, Torrington. Something about the cast of his features must have sown the germ of this idea."

"Nothing of the kind!" Torrington cried, turning to him excitedly. "I never saw his features! Carey" —he peered down at his friend intently—"it was the inner man, the soul of the man, that revolted me. I wonder if I shall ever know the truth? I hope so; for I should like to be able to recognize something in that creature's life history to account for my impressions."

"This is astounding," said Carey. "I don't understand it at all."

"Neither did I!" Muir Torrington turned to him again, and his curiously wide-open eyes seemed to have become more widely opened than usual. "That was why I acted as I did. Carey—Carey, lad, there is a mystery, a black, sticky mystery, about that house and its owner! And I determined, on sight of this furtive, creepy being, that he was a link not to be lost sight of. Our friend, Trepniak, is not a nice man to know, and it came to me that somewhere, at the other end of the journey upon which Quasimodo was setting out, lay a clue to the real life of this social star whose hobby is the vivisection of reptiles. Then and there I made up my mind to follow."

"Good heavens!" Carey exclaimed. "Time and success have not changed you, Torrington!"

"No!" Torrington smiled slightly. "There is a part of me which is ungovernable, lad. I have imprisoned it for many years; otherwise, I should not have gone as far as I have contrived to go. But to-night it broke the bars. Nothing mattered but the tracking of this hunchbacked horror—this abominable, subterranean bug who came crawling out of the basement of Trepniak's house. I had never seen his face, yet I loathed him. I loathed his shuffling gait; and I made up my mind, Carey——" He began feverishly to pace the floor again. "I made up my mind to track him to his dirty nest, whatever the consequences might be. A mad mood, if you like, but——" He paused, turned. "If ever I saw a poisonous insect in human shape, I saw one to-night. My course was unavoidable."

And, as Torrington spoke, Carey seemed to be carried back, over the intervening years, to a meeting of the wildest set who ever painted Edinburgh red—the set whose president had been Muir Torrington. He laughed, shortly.

"Only marriage will finally dispose of your unruly prisoner, old man!" he said. "But go on; this thing may mean a lot to me."

Muir Torrington nodded vigorously.

"I was thinking of you," he continued, "as I watched that stooping horror shuffling along in front of me—of you and of Jasmine Hope; because any man who tolerates such an abomination on his premises cannot possibly be a nice man to know. Well——" he paused in his thirteenth or fourteenth attempt to relight his pipe—"I dropped back a few paces but kept my quarry well in view. Coming to Hyde Park Corner, where there was a considerable knot of people, I drew up closer. I was waiting for an opportunity to get a glimpse of the man's face."

"And did you?"

Torrington shook his head.

"Never so much as a peep," he answered. "The fellow joined the group waiting for motor 'busses, and I debated whether I should engage a taxi to follow, or whether I should get on the same 'bus. Whilst I was debating, a 'bus pulled up. I had no alternative then.

"Many of the people waiting were women, some of them apparently charwomen, who had been engaged in cleaning offices in the neighbourhood, I presume. At any rate, the greater number seemed to want to mount this particular 'bus; but Quasimodo was an easy first.

Exhibiting a sudden, surprising agility, he swept everyone out of his path, leapt on the footboard, and, hugging his bag, went scuttling up to the top deck!

"His outburst of energy was wasted. The evening threatened rain, you remember, and the inside was more popular than the roof, to which only two passengers mounted, and I was one of them. But at the moment that I reached the top of the steps I recognized the fact that my man had tricked me again. He had taken a front seat and to have sat beside him, when all the other seats were vacant, would have been childish stalking. I saw that, unless he turned round, it would be quite impossible for me to see his face throughout the journey!

"However, having thrown routine to the winds, I lighted my pipe and settled down to the chase: along Piccadilly, up Bond Street, Oxford Street, then to Holborn, from Holborn to the Bank, and, finally, to Aldgate! There were two rather curious episodes, the first when the conductor came to collect the fares.

"When he got to the atrocity on the front seat, he evidently spoke sharply, although the noise of the vehicle drowned his words. I had taken a place at the rear, on the near side, hoping for a view of my man's face as he descended. Evidently, the conductor was complaining of Quasimodo's rough behaviour when he had mounted the 'bus. The passenger, his black hat sunk between his raised shoulders, so that he resembled a squatting vulture, merely extended his fare, not even deigning to glance aside. This evidently aroused George's Cockney spirit (all 'bus conductors are called George). He bent down, resting one hand on the back

of the seat, and said something exclusively poisonous.

"Our stooping friend turned slowly, but the shadow of his damned hat still hid his features—from me, that is, but not from the conductor! George fell back as though he had been struck, turned, and literally ran downstairs!"

"But do you think," Carey interrupted, "that it was the sight of the man's face which produced this result, or something which he said?"

"I don't know," Torrington replied; "the sight of him, I think, for I could never hope to make you understand the uncleanness of the creature. But I waited patiently, and in Holborn an elderly woman mounted to the top deck, carrying a black bundle. At this time all seats were occupied except the one next to my hunchbacked acquaintance. The woman saw this, and made for it just as the 'bus restarted. She had nearly reached it when a lurch threw her violently against Quasimodo. He turned, slowly, as he had turned to the conductor.

"Well—I know it sounds preposterous, Carey!—the woman nearly fell down in her anxiety to get away from him! Nursing her bundle, she staggered back to the steps and somehow managed to descend. I don't know what became of her; I suppose she stood up inside."

"Good heavens!" Carey muttered. "The man's face, as well as his body, must have borne some hideous deformity."

Muir Torrington, restlessly pacing the floor, paused in front of him.

"His *soul* was deformed," he said in a low voice. "If

the mere sight of his crooked back could fill one with such horror, what must the glance of his eye have been like? However, just at this moment, the 'bus came to a stop in Aldgate, and I saw the hunchback rise. At last I could see his face!"

"And did you?" Carey asked, excitedly.

"Damn it, he was too cunning! As he stood up grasping his bag in his left hand, he sneezed, pulled out a huge red handkerchief, and, his face buried in its folds, hurried from the 'bus!"

"He realized that he was followed?"

"I don't know." Here Torrington began to knock out his cold pipe in the hearth. "But he was devilishly cautious."

"And where did he go?"

"He crossed the road and mounted a second 'bus, bound for the Far East. Again he clambered up to the roof, but this time I elected to ride inside. I thought that in this way I might catch him off his guard as he descended. I was wrong. At Limehouse Town Hall he came down, but his head was so bent and twisted aside that I had not even a momentary glimpse of a feature. And now my inexperience as a sleuth betrayed me.

"I am almost certain that from this point onward our deformed contemporary knew that he was followed. The outstanding impression which I derived from that receding hump, that lowered, black-hatted head, was one of intense cunning. There was a powerful, evil intelligence at work in the beetle body. But my blood was up, and not caring whether he knew himself to be followed or otherwise, I pressed on behind him down

West India Dock Road, until he suddenly disappeared into a turning on the left. The neighbourhood was utterly unfamiliar to me. There were any number of people about, some of them Asiatics, and I knew that I was in the region of Chinatown.

"However, I was determined not to lose the scent, and, missing my man on the main road in front of me, I broke into a run, turned the corner, and, just in the nick of time, saw him open a door in an otherwise blank brick wall and slip in. As I reached the door, it was shut in my face!"

"But," Carey interjected, now completely held by the narrative, "to what house did this door belong?"

Muir Torrington began to re-load his pipe.

"Wait!" he replied, "I am coming to the crowning mystery of a very abominable business. Having inanely wasted much valuable time exploring what I suddenly realized to be a back entrance, I hurried along to the front of the house. It was a mean, two-storied affair facing an unclean alley. One window, which boasted a dilapidated red blind, was lighted. It belonged to a room on the ground floor left of the door. There was no forecourt; it was flush with the street. Through a hole in the blind I looked in."

"Yes! Go on!"

"Through a hole in the blind," Torrington repeated slowly, "I looked in. I saw a dingy sitting room lighted by a common oil lamp. The one door, facing me, was just closing. I had a glimpse of a hand—the hand of the person who held the door. Then it was withdrawn. On a sofa a woman lay, unconscious—some kind of half-caste woman, swarthy, unprepossessing.

Her pose, the lifeless way in which an arm hung down, so that her fingers touched the floor, called to me, Carey. I stepped to the door. Through the hole which served as a letterbox a piece of string was hanging. I pulled it. I found myself inside—right in the room. . . . Carey—Carey, lad, I was too late."

"What do you mean?" Carey whispered.

"She was past aid. Oh, I don't suggest murder! There were no marks of violence."

"She was dead?"

"No; she died while I knelt beside her."

"Without recovering consciousness?"

"Without properly recovering consciousness, yes. But just before the end she murmured a few words which I shall never forget."

"What were the words?"

Muir Torrington, standing over by the door, fixed his gaze intently upon Carey, and:

"'The grey face!'" he replied. "'The grey face!'"

CHAPTER X

THE GLASS MASK

AND whilst these two talked in George Street a strange scene was being enacted in that small, tower-like room crowning the house in Park Lane recently acquired by Trepniak. The room, which could be approached only by a narrow staircase from the study below, was fitted as a sort of freakish laboratory, its appointments being of a character calculated to induce any modern man of science to doubt his sanity. Cagliostro might have worked in such a place or Dr. John Dee; it resembled the dream of some disciple of Avicenna who had eaten *hashish*, or the observatory of a priest of Bel.

Amid many singular objects, the purposes of which must have defied the experience of any scientist in Europe, there was one to claim prior attention—a thing as anomalous as a figment of sleep. This was an enormous globe of solid crystal, or, since it possessed a faint blue tinge, of beryl. It rested upon the needle-pointed apex of a tall pedestal. A similar point, descending like a stalactite from the ceiling, touched the top of the globe. And, propelled by no visible power, the huge gleaming ball—it was some four feet in diameter—revolved ceaselessly, like a lesser planet spinning on its axis. Its motion created a faint humming sound, and

the light of the one shaded lamp in the place glittered upon it strangely as it spun.

The ceiling of the room presented a uniform surface of aluminium, of which metal it appeared to be composed. The small uncurtained windows were set so high that no view of the interior could be obtained from any point in the neighbourhood. Three of the walls, including that against which was set a glass-topped laboratory table, were furnished with cases; and these cases, in addition to numerous phials of chemicals, contained perhaps the most unique and horrifying collection ever gathered together beneath one roof.

Here were hideous implements of sacrificial magic; the head of a nameless monstrosity possessing a horn in the centre of its forehead and the features of a Mongolian satan, preserved in a large jar—locks of hair covering a wide range of colour, and each lock stretched tightly between golden hooks in a little ebony box.

In a sort of coffin-shaped casket, of some wood black with antiquity and roughly carved in crude, prehistoric characters, lay a woman's arm and hand. A plate-glass lid had been fitted to the casket, presumably rendering it air-tight. But no process of mummifying known to medical science or the archæologist could account for the exquisite whiteness of that rounded, severed limb. The long, taper fingers rested upon the black wood caressingly. The nails had the pink tinge of youth and health. It might have been the hand of some dainty lady of to-day except that those pink nails were curiously blunted and uncared-for.

Suspended within a sort of aluminium tripod hung

a crystal chalice. The top was closed and sealed and the chalice seemed to contain faint green vapour. Within this vapour, invisibly suspended or floating, appeared a human heart. It was beating with perfect regularity.

In a case in the eastern corner of the room rested an exact model of Stonehenge. Above it were a series of lamps controlled by a small switchboard. They were various-coloured, and so placed that, with the room in darkness, it would have been possible to reproduce in miniature the effect of sunlight or of moonlight upon this model of the ancient British temple.

At so late an hour few vehicles passed along the Lane below. Rare sounds penetrated to the place, but in muffled form. So that save for the whirring of the great globe there was silence in this laboratory above Park Lane.

At the table a man sat absorbed in an experiment. He wore a loose black robe which enveloped him from neck to feet, thin rubber gloves upon his hands, and a glass mask upon his face. He was bent as if with age or great weariness, and his movements, though silent, and directed by an obvious intensity of purpose, suggested high nervous tension.

In a test-tube a deep red liquid was bubbling above the flame of a burner. Now, the man withdrew it and held it up before the shaded lamp. He watched it intently, second after second. As it cooled, it grew deeper in colour, and when it had assumed a dark purple hue he placed it quickly in a little rack. Grasping two pieces of flex hooked to a fitting upon the table, he plunged them into the liquid so that the naked wires

touched. There was a sharp crackling sound, and a little puff of steam arose.

Feverishly the man in the glass mask uncorked a small flask containing an opaque fluid resembling liquid gold. His hand shook, but by an effort of will he steadied it. Then—one, two, three drops he added to the contents of the test-tube, which, now, had become perfectly black. He replaced the stopper in the little flask.

Then, taking the tube from the rack, he held it up again to the light of the lamp. No visible change took place. But, minute after minute, he watched, sitting motionless, stooped.

Finally he stood up, uttering a groan like that of a dying man, and, raising the test-tube above his head, he dashed it on the tiled floor and ground the fragments beneath his heel. Exhaustion followed. He dropped back into the chair and lay still—still as one dead.

At last, very slowly, he began to move again. From a shelf near the table he took a flask containing a small quantity of the red fluid which so curiously resembled blood. He selected a clean test-tube and filled it. There was a bare sufficiency of the viscous liquid, and he seemed to be stricken by fear of a third failure; for he had already failed twice.

With a hand which he vainly sought to steady he held the tube above the burner, moving it in slow circles within the tongue of fire. Presently faint wreaths of steam arose; then the liquid began to boil. At the moment that it came to boiling point he withdrew it and raised it to the light, watching the changes of colour

until the hue of dull purple proclaimed itself. Then he placed the tube in the rack, paused a moment, as if nerving himself for the task, and, seizing the electric wires, joined them in the tube.

Came again the crackling and puff of steam. He reached for that little flask which contained mysterious liquid gold, and, in removing the stopper, almost upset it. He averted catastrophe in the nick of time, but lay back shaken with a storm of trembling. This he conquered by a second desperate effort, succeeded in steadying his hand, and now added not three but four golden drops to the black liquid in the tube.

He did not watch for the result, but, restoppering the flask, stood up, stoopingly, opened a safe buried in the wall, right of the stairs, and locked the flask within it.

Then—slowly—slowly—he turned and looked toward the tube in the rack. The lamplight shone down upon it. One glance he cast at its contents, and instantly, weirdly, an exultant, muffled cry, more animal than human, sounded from beneath the glass mask. He grasped the tube; he held it up in a hand grown steady as that of a carven figure.

The fluid was black no longer! It was seething and moving insidiously, pulsing as though with some strange spiritual life. It had now assumed the colour of a very dark sherry; and, as he watched, exulting, gloating over it, it grew lighter and ever lighter; until at last this strange action within the liquid ceased, and what remained in the tube—for it was greatly diminished in quantity—resembled a tiny drop of pale cognac.

From a drawer in the table the masked man took out

a small graduated bottle, and, using a glass funnel, poured the contents of the test-tube into it. He corked the bottle and set it upon the table before him.

He pressed an electric button, and above the dull humming sound of the ever-revolving globe rose the purr of an electric fan. The masked man moved a lever controlling the windows, and when he judged the air to be clear of whatever fumes he feared he stopped the fan, reclosed the windows, and standing up, removed his mask.

CHAPTER XI

AT LOW KETLEY

IT WAS very dull at Low Ketley, or so Jasmine thought. The people around were quite unexciting, as she knew from experience, and although she loved Aunt Phil, her father's younger sister, the good lady's exemplary Scottish character always bored her after a time. She had a secret suspicion that this quietude was part of the prescription.

Tints of autumn were beginning to show themselves in hedge and woodland, and the garden of Low Ketley reminded Jasmine of her own hair when by force of circumstance or because of sheer laziness she had neglected it: a shampoo seemed to be indicated. Autumn had no joys for Jasmine. Temporarily, at any rate, she was caught in the stream of those who seek an eternal spring. The neighbours were very autumnal, too. Most of them were old, and those who were young wore horn-rimmed spectacles and talked about "Back to Methuselah." Aunt Phil, furthermore, had a genius for engaging silent servants. Low Ketley was a mute house.

The election to which her father had referred left Jasmine extremely cold. Her sympathies were modern, but not so modern as to include the vice of politics. Some of her friends had assured her that this meant a

great gap in her life, but nevertheless she was wont to admit that she preferred dancing to speech-making. Yes, it was very boring. She was thrown almost entirely upon her own resources; perhaps a part of the cure. For on reflection—and she had ample time for reflection—her father's idea in rusticating her could only be explained in one of two ways.

He disapproved of some man whom he imagined she favoured, or he disapproved of the general lightness of her life. In either event it meant a cure, and, as a doctor's daughter, she detested cures. She had suffered them before, but never gladly.

Jasmine groped for a box of cigarettes which lay upon the window-seat, keeping her eyes fixed in an unseeing stare upon a group of firs topping the mound which concealed the tennis courts. They showed as silhouettes, for the moon hung over the distant hills investing the heather. Jasmine had learned that the smell of heather by night was different from that which characterized it during the day. Except for faint chirping of bats and the rare jarring note of a night bird in the coppice, all was very still. The smell of the heather to-night was like the smell of Harris tweed, by which mental stepping-stones Jasmine's thoughts came to Douglas Carey.

She always associated Douglas with Harris tweeds. He was not a dressy man, and, although she tried, she could not recall that she had ever seen him wearing a morning coat. He wore blue serge sometimes, but Harris tweeds usually, except at night when he bowed to custom. It was characteristic, of course, and in a small way had helped to mark him out from the others.

Yes, he was very different from the others. He had grave blue eyes in which at times she found something pathetic—something that disarmed her. His dogged pertinacity she knew well. It had carried him far. And because he was weak where she was concerned, she experienced no triumph—on the contrary, she wanted to "mother" him.

Yet against this instinct she revolted and wished desperately that he would not look at her in that gentle way. If he would only be more brutal. She had often wondered if he did not care enough, was not so deeply stirred as to trouble to assert himself. That disarming, pathetic expression—she hated it because it so often recurred to her—hated it doubly now, now that doubt had come. It had been deliberate, of course; a trick which he had found effective with others. Jasmine was glad that it had not quite conquered in her case. Probably it had proved very successful with Madame Sabinov.

She found and lighted a cigarette without removing her gaze from the distant trees. How could he have lied to her so deliberately, so childishly; and why, in any event, did she torture her mind in quest of reasons? Many men had lied to her. Probably, with the exception of her father, every man she knew had lied to her. What did it matter? Yet why—why? It was so unnecessary.

As if attracted by the glow of her cigarette, a bat swooped very low and near to the window. Jasmine shrank back instinctively, and the bat, a large one, floated away again.

It was difficult to believe that London was so near.

Even in Aunt Phil's obsolete car it would be quite possible to get to the Embassy in time for supper. Perhaps Douglas was there with Madame Sabinov. But no; she rather thought he would be at the Mayfair. Probably this unnatural, white-haired adventuress had a weakness for the newer club.

He was so earnest, and she had thought him so different. He was unobtrusive, yet in any gathering of the men she knew he seemed to dominate. One other there was who had that quality. But in the latter case it was due at least in some part to deliberate eccentricity: M. de Trepniak.

Trepniak was very fascinating. Everyone found him so. Jasmine determined to give her mind a rest from these perpetual, useless imaginings centring round Douglas Carey and to think awhile of the mysterious, romantic figure of the Russian millionaire. At least, his name was Russian, or so someone had told her. Personally, she did not think he was a Russian, nor had she ever before met with the prefix "de" in connection with a Russian name. Certainly he was not English. If his mode of dress, his car, his servants, were not a mere pose, then he was even more extraordinary than his reputation.

Jasmine hated his manner of dressing. It was effeminate, yet, curiously, the man himself was brutally masculine, dominating, virile. There was something pagan about him. He seemed to belong to another age—a coarser age. She associated him with a younger world—a world which had not known the softening touch of Christianity. Some of her friends frankly courted him. To be with Trepniak was to be conspicu-

ous, and, strangely enough, to be envied. Jasmine alone, so far as she could gather, had felt—not revulsion, for this he had never inspired—but fear, a sense of strangeness, of danger, in the company of the man whom everyone seemed to know, yet whom no one knew.

In this respect, alone, he was unusual. A mysterious stranger, given sufficient capital, may sometimes storm New York society. The feat is more difficult in London. In Paris, it is next to impossible. Trepniak had succeeded in London and in Paris. Jasmine did not know if he had ever been in America.

The bat, or another, flew down, this time sweeping a little way into the open window. She shrank back chilled as the creature flew out again and disappeared in the direction of the coppice.

Jasmine was angry with herself for being afraid of bats. Her feminine distaste for mice she had conquered many years before, but bats and spiders defied her. She had never fainted—modern woman does not faint; but she had a horrible conviction that if ever a bat touched her, settled in her hair, as she had read of such creatures doing, she should swoon. The thought of a spider touching her bare flesh was equally revolting, yet she despised these weaknesses.

And now, with a suppressed exclamation of annoyance, she set her foot upon the cigarette which she had dropped when shrinking back from the approach of the little winged animal. The night was curiously and oppressively hot. There was simply not a shadow of excuse for closing her window. She reached down again to the box upon the seat beside her—an exquisite

thing without which she never travelled, a gift of Douglas Carey's.

It was of ivory and mother-o'-pearl, ebony lined. Upon the centre of the lid was a panel in relief worked in semi-precious stones and representing flowers and leaves, reproduced with that faithful detail peculiar to the little almond-eyed craftsmen of Japan. As well as cigarettes, the box contained some rings which she rarely wore, charms, and other trinkets. They sparkled attractively in the reflected moonlight.

Jasmine's mood changed. She was far too wide-awake for sleep. She suddenly determined to put on a pair of warm stockings and thick-soled shoes, her fur-lined motor coat over her dressing gown, and to take a stroll in the garden. She could get out through the kitchen without waking a soul. Whereupon, lighting another cigarette, she proceeded to put the plan into execution.

As she came out into the paved yard and found herself in the shadow of the garage which housed her aunt's car, irreverently christened by Jasmine "The Caravan," she experienced a joyous sense of truancy. It was part of her creed that to be different is to be happy, and because she believed that she was different she did not realize that nearly every member of her set was different in just the same way.

She was anxious to reach the tennis courts, to feel herself bathed in the cold light of the moon. But coming to the end of the path which led in that direction she hesitated. The garden of Low Ketley possessed a novel feature. Southeast of the house, and dividing it from the heath, was a curious, tree-topped

mound—the same which she could see from her bedroom window. The tennis courts were beyond this mound, and some fanciful designer before her aunt's time had elected to build a rock garden upon the slope facing the house and to open in its centre a tunnel which led through to the courts beyond. It was very short, twenty or thirty paces, quaintly paved, and lined and roofed with moss-grown terra-cotta slabs.

Jasmine had never regarded this passage as being in the least degree mysterious, but then, she had never had occasion to enter it at night. In it were boxes containing croquet sets, damaged tennis racquets, and other odds and ends. It was perfectly dark now, however, because of the bend halfway along, and she tried to tell herself that she would be sure to bark her shins upon something if she attempted to walk through.

In her heart of hearts she knew that this minor danger was not the real deterrent; and because of the Scottish element in her character, to recognize this was to issue a challenge to herself—a challenge which she dared not refuse. She stepped quickly into the passage, her right hand resting upon the tiled wall, for she knew that the croquet boxes and other lumber were stacked against that on the left. So, she came to the bend, turned it, and could see the moon-bathed lawn beyond.

Three paces from the entrance a man was standing looking in her direction as if he expected her! In the pallid light his face was colourless as parchment. Jasmine's heart seemed to turn cold, and she clutched at the wall for support.

It was Trepniak.

CHAPTER XII

"SUCH STUFF AS DREAMS ARE MADE ON"

JASMINE was so far a true product of her generation as to be ashamed of fear. One gathers that Victorian young ladies lived altogether more sheltered lives; because they were so unfamiliar with the ways of men they feared them as we all fear the unknown. The cave-man and the sheikh-man of modern literature are interesting to feminine readers in the same way that the Spanish Armada is of interest to boys; as a fascinating danger never likely to be met with. Bats Jasmine was regretfully compelled to fear —and spiders; ghosts, she considered herself entitled to fear, whilst never expecting to meet one. But a man! She would be untrue to herself, to her traditions, if she consented to fear a man. Some such theories or reflections passed with lightning quickness through her brain now as she confronted Trepniak standing out there upon the lawn.

He was strange, mysterious, of unknown origin; the source of his wealth was an insoluble problem. But he was only a man, after all. Her heart, which had seemed to forget its functions for a while, began now to beat again with unusual rapidity, but her brain, momentarily numbed, was restored to its natural coolness.

Trepniak wore evening dress, with the French cape and sombrero which she knew. He removed the

sombrero now, and bowed in the extravagant fashion which was his. This characteristic mannerism quite restored her courage.

"My dear Miss Hope," he said—and she noted with peculiar disfavour his guttural voice and faint accent—"I fear I must have startled you."

That it had been physically impossible for him to see her was a fact which did not occur to Jasmine. Many women, even clever women, share with the ostrich the curious belief that if they cannot see a person that person cannot see them; hence those familiar indiscretions which have created a race of "Peeping Toms." The reverse also holds good. Since Trepniak was clearly visible to Jasmine, the fact of his perceiving her in a place where there was no light whatever did not strike her as phenomenal. She replied quite naturally, advancing to meet him:

"Yes, M. de Trepniak, you did, rather."

"I am sorry," he said, and stood aside to allow her to come out upon the lawn. "Allow me to explain."

She drew her coat tightly about her, and, her courage fully restored, stood there looking at him.

"I learned this morning," he continued, "that you were staying here, and as I was returning from Brighton, I ventured to make a call, forgetting that London hours are not country hours. I did not know my way very well, and, blundering in the direction of the house——"

"You saw me coming to meet you?" Jasmine interrupted: "I quite understand. You have left your car in the lane?"

"Yes, and had evidently taken the wrong path to the front door."

"You have certainly strayed," said Jasmine, laughingly. "But if you came to see me, here I am—a very lonely little country mouse."

Trepniak smiled. He had not replaced his hat, and the effect of the brilliant moonlight upon the close, tight curls which covered his head awoke some sort of memory in the girl's mind. She was unable to identify this memory, but actually it was that of a bust of Nero which she had seen in the Vatican.

"A mouse, yes," he agreed; "for the mouse is a misunderstood creature, very dainty and elusive. But lonely? I find it very hard to believe that you could ever be lonely. Upon a desert island, perhaps. In any place where there are men, except in a community of the blind—no, I cannot believe."

She did not entirely approve of his reference to a community of the blind. It was an admission of physical attraction, and Jasmine's theories were wholly antisensual. For a man to praise her hair, her eyes, her arms, her ankles, was fatal, an unforgivable indiscretion. Women who valued such flatteries were only fit to be toys, and the days of the *harêm* were past. It was because Douglas Carey had never allowed the physical man once to appear in his wooing that she had been attracted to him. Yet, it was because she knew, subconsciously, that the physical man was merely hidden but not absent that she loved him.

"You are wrong," she replied slowly, as side by side they began to cross the lawn. "I am really lonely."

"I agree," said Trepniak. "For understanding, but not for companionship."

"Every woman is lonely in that way," Jasmine re-

torted; "but here I am lonely in every way. You are the first human being who has come to see me."

"Like attracts like," he replied. "If there is a goddess of loneliness she has drawn us together."

"What!" Jasmine exclaimed. "*You*, lonely? Why, you know everybody."

He nodded several times, swinging his hat as he walked.

"And, consequently," he returned, "know nobody."

A bat circled overhead, and, swooping, descended near to them for a moment. Jasmine shrank instinctively, and:

"You are afraid of bats?" Trepniak asked.

Jasmine drew her coat more closely about her, glancing upward fearfully.

"Yes," she said. "It's silly, but I am."

"An instinct," Trepniak declared, "and perhaps a wise one; for some of the instincts of women which appear foolish are fundamental and protective. Science would do well to study them. Oh, I mean this. Let me explain. The bat is harmless in itself, but there is a form of parasite peculiar to bats which, if transferred to the human body, produces unpleasant consequences."

"Really!" Jasmine exclaimed. "I had never heard this before."

"No?" Trepniak smiled again. "One of Nature's mysteries which Science has so far overlooked, Miss Hope."

The strangeness of the situation now suddenly presented itself to Jasmine. She chose to ignore the formalities, but she could not fail to recognize that this

midnight promenade with Trepniak, even to the most broad-minded, must present all the features of a secret rendezvous. She stood still, somewhere near the centre of the lawns, facing her companion.

"How strange," she said, musingly, "that you should have come here to-night."

"To me it does not seem strange," Trepniak replied. "I am attracted to you naturally—so naturally. Let me tell you; but if I bore you, stop me. You see, all my early life was devoted to science, to hard work. I was a slave to my studies. Half of me remained unexpressed. When success came, and such wealth as I had never anticipated, the result was extravagance, perhaps. That other half of me did not unfold—it burst open. Life is so short, and although I was still a comparatively young man, there was so much to be crammed into what of life remained to me. My nature changed. I despised my old pursuits. It seemed to me that I had wasted many precious years; and finding myself, shall I say a millionaire—believe me, it is not an exaggeration—all the dreams, many of them forgotten, which had been mine and which I think must be every man's, suddenly demanded realization, now that realization became possible."

Jasmine remained silent, and Trepniak continued:

"My way of life, my home, are extravagant. Yes, deliberately so, perhaps childishly so. But only because repression strengthens the thing which is repressed. Every man dreams of power—of the pride of possession, of astonishing, of exceeding his fellows. I, to whom even the attempt to do so had been denied, suddenly found in my hands a power like that lever of

which Archimedes dreamed. If I seem sometimes mad, forgive me. I am trying to burn up in one short human life all the madness that was born in me. Many men would seek to do the same if they had the opportunity. And I am drawn to you, Miss Hope, because you are groping for expression, which, if you could achieve it, would be wonderful. I know this—I feel it. There is here a kinship, although you may not have recognized it as I have done. There would be joy for you as there is for me in commanding the sun to shine—in knowing that the command must be obeyed; in willing the tempest—and seeing it leap up. Power—the knowledge of possessing it for good or for evil! There is much of the feminine in me, perhaps, but to you, who are all woman, what would it mean, such a power? What could it accomplish? What could it not accomplish?"

Jasmine, watching him, listening to him, was carried away by the sheer force of the speaker. That provocative memory taunted her. It was something pagan—an emperor, a god, who spoke, who stood before her in the moonlight—real, yet unreal.

Vaguely, she was afraid of him again, as she had been when first she had seen him at the end of the mound tunnel. It was a strange fear and not entirely of the man. It was rather of what he embodied, what he stood for. The part of her that was Scottish awoke automatically, as the bristles of the porcupine arise at the approach of danger. Trepniak was looking, not at her, but upward to the moon; and his strange, pallid face, the pose of his powerful body, provoked her, yet the protective instinct was stronger. She wondered

in what degree his words, his attitude now, were a pose, in what degree they were sincere, and:

"M. de Trepniak," she said.

He lowered his gaze immediately, looking at her, and even as he did so she regretted the urgency of her words. His eyes, which she had always noted as strange, now, in the light of the moon, looked almost inhuman. But:

"I am sorry," she continued firmly. "I must go back. As you said, London hours are not country hours. Oh, I know you don't mind, and I am so glad to have seen you."

Fear, real fear, was mounting in her heart. Where, a few moments ago, the thought of discovery had shocked her, now she would have welcomed the sound of her aunt's cold voice, of any one's voice, of the bark of a dog. She dragged her glance from his, and turned, retracing her steps.

"Please forgive me," she said. "It was silly of me to come out. But I feel dreadfully cold. Won't you come down to-morrow and lunch with us?"

Trepniak turned and walked beside her.

"It is good of you," he replied in a low voice. "I am grateful. Yet I fear I cannot accept. My day is full. But, believe me, this little talk has made me very happy. Which way do we go?"

Without glancing aside:

"Just as far as the gate there," Jasmine explained; "then you continue along the drive to your car, and I turn to the right."

She tried not to hurry, yet hastened her steps, and, the gate reached—for now she simply dared not face

the tunnel under the mound—she turned for a moment and held out her hand.

"Good-night," she said. "I am so glad to have seen you."

The desire to look into the pale face was almost irresistible; yet she resisted, turned, and crying again, "Good-night!" ran fleetly through the kitchen garden, never hesitating, never faltering, turned again to the right, without even glancing in the direction of the rock garden where the tunnel opened, and raced to the kitchen door. She threw it open, forgetful of disturbances, and, safely inside, thrust the bolts home and leaned against the door, breathless, her heart beating almost painfully.

For a while she was too greatly overcome to proceed. The source of this ungovernable fear, which had mercilessly unseated that self-possession upon which she prided herself, Jasmine could not have defined. She was in such a state of terror as hitherto she had known only in nightmares. But at last she summoned her proud spirit from wherever it shrank in hiding and proceeded quickly to her room.

She wanted to leap into bed and pull the clothes over her head, as she had often done in childhood. Yet she hesitated, standing very still just inside the door, and listening. She was trying to detect the sound of the car which Trepniak said he had left in the lane. The Herculean pulse of Trepniak's Farman should have been audible for miles in the stillness of the countryside. But she could detect no sound except the beating of her own heart.

It occurred to her that from the window of a neigh-

bouring room she would be able to see the headlights of any car that might stand in the lane. Without giving herself time to change her mind or to compromise with her fear of the dark passage intervening, she set out, entered the room she had in mind, and crossed to the window.

To her surprise, for it overlooked the porch and therefore was very accessible from the drive below, it was wide open. Jasmine leaned upon the ledge, looking across a narrow strip of lawn to where a bank of rhododendrons intervened between the grounds and the lane beyond.

There was no car there, no glimmer of a light, nor could she detect any sound. But, as she watched, she saw something—something that rose from the undergrowth like a grey mist, gradually taking shape, and floating across the grass in her direction. Blackly the shadow of the house lay here; yet she could see this mist swiftly crossing the lawn and growing more and more attenuated, stretching upward and farther upward. At the top it spread out, mushroom fashion, was growing dense, taking definite shape.

Suddenly, when it was no more than five or six yards from her, she discerned the outline of a face which seemed to float within the smoky greyness—a dead face, except for the eyes, which glowed with a sullen fire.

A wisp of the vapour, as if caught in a breath of air, was blown in the direction of the window. She felt it touch her forehead—coldly, clammily. The swift, appalling horror of the thing literally paralyzed her. She tried to scream but could utter no sound. Then,

as the deathly grey face rose almost level with the window, her knees collapsed beneath her and she sank down.

Her ankle was twisted under her, and the physical pain curiously aroused physical resistance. She must close the window—at all costs she must close the window. She clutched desperately at the ledge, dragging herself up. Then she became motionless again—staring straight before her at a clump of trees crowning a mound and beyond them to where the moon hung very low in a cloudless sky.

A bat flew rapidly by. She moved her head, looking down at the Japanese box of ivory and mother-o'-pearl which she clutched tightly in her right hand. She seemed to hear the wild beating of her heart, but no other sound was audible. She was crouching on the window seat of her own room, a light dressing gown over her night robe, and her bare feet—one of which, by reason of her unnatural attitude, was paining her acutely—thrust into fur-trimmed bedroom slippers!

She tenderly moved the tortured foot, sinking down limply upon the cushions and trying to think where and when she had taken off her shoes and stockings and her motor coat. It was the motor coat which gave her the first clue to a solution of the mystery. She remembered that it was home in Half-Moon Street. She had not brought it with her to Low Ketley!

It took some time for the truth wholly to dawn, but at last comprehension came. She had never left her room—she had never left her place at the window. Unaccountably, she had fallen asleep here, at exactly what moment she found it impossible to determine.

But her midnight walk, her meeting with Trepniak, her sudden fear and panic return, lastly, the horror of the floating grey face—all had been a dream, a hallucination—she scarcely knew how to define it. But, mercifully, it had been unreal.

A bat must have touched her as she sat by the window. She shuddered at the thought, yet the incident had served the purpose; aided by the pain in her twisted foot, it had recalled her from that evil land of mirage into which she had slipped.

Already the details of her strange illusion were becoming difficult to recall. One prevailed—the one she would most gladly have chosen to forget: the horror of a deathly grey face floating mistily over the grass.

CHAPTER XIII

A ROOM IN LIMEHOUSE

"SHE was the wife of a Chinese sailor," said the Inspector. "We haven't had time to find out very much more about her."

Carey nodded shortly. This was a misty morning, with a damp tang in the air, and he suppressed a shudder, glancing aside at Detective-Inspector Whiteleaf, his companion. The shudder may have had a physical cause or it may have been due to the memory of an unpleasant task which he had just accomplished.

No one of the party assembled in the office of that East End Police Station looked altogether happy, since all but Carey had been called from their beds fully an hour earlier than usual. For his part he had not slept at all. From Muir Torrington's house he had communicated with the Commissioner; the Limehouse police had busied themselves in the small hours; and now at a time when newly awakened London began to think of breakfast, he was already on the spot. Ridden by restless doubts and fears, Carey found himself an object of unusual interest and curiosity to the sleepy officials, who failed to understand the urgency or importance of the case.

Why the death of a half-caste woman in Pennyfields, apparently from natural causes, should result in this

early morning visit from an inspector of the Criminal Investigation Department, accompanied by a private inquirer armed with wide discretionary powers, was a mystery to all of them. The Divisional Surgeon had very resentfully attended this unusual conference. But beyond mentioning a curious mark upon the body, which might indicate that some kind of injection had been made, he confessed himself unable to account for the woman's death. A post-mortem examination must take place, and from this some results might be hoped for.

"Very well, Inspector Whiteleaf," said Carey; "suppose we go along to the house now? You know the way, I take it."

"I do," replied the Inspector grimly. "This district at one time was my special province."

Carey's two-seater was at the door, and through the early morning mist they set out, down West India Dock Road and into Pennyfields. It was unfamiliar territory to Carey and he drove slowly, looking about him.

He was in the heart of Chinatown. Open doorways afforded glimpses of mixed households. Some of the domestic intimacies revealed must have astonished one unaccustomed to the naïveté of the Oriental. White women and half-caste children he saw in plenty—all busily employed; the Chinamen, when visible, for the most part sat on their steps smoking and enjoying the morning air. Then:

"Here we are, sir," said the Inspector, and Carey pulled up the car at the end of a narrow courtway. He endeavoured to picture the scene enacted on the

previous evening—the hunchback shuffling along and turning this very corner; the gaunt, nervous figure of Muir Torrington breaking into a run. His imagination visualized this unsavoury court by night and he wondered if he should have had the courage to push the thing so far as Torrington had done.

A constable was on duty before the house and he saluted as Whiteleaf and Carey came up.

"I am surprised that there are no onlookers, Inspector," said the latter, when they had entered the house, Whiteleaf pulling the string descending from the letter-box as described by Torrington.

"In almost any other district there would be," was the reply; "but in this quarter half the inhabitants are Asiatics and they don't seem to have any curiosity about anything, and the other half are so curious where the police are concerned that they keep well out of the way. There's the sofa she was lying on, sir."

They were in the room depicted by Torrington—a small and dingy apartment. The ragged blind had been rolled up, allowing the morning light to flood the place. The sofa referred to was an antique of the horsehair description, and to all intents and purposes it was the only solid piece of furniture in the room. There were two common cane-seated chairs both of them restored with no regard for artistic effect, and a very rickety table, upon which was spread a stained green cloth. In the grate a fire was laid. On the mantelshelf, draped with perfectly colourless material which at some time had been red plush, were cheap ornaments and an American clock. Above it hung a photograph of the late Lord Kitchener, obviously cut from an

almanac, and adorned by a really beautiful but badly damaged Japanese frame.

Through the doorway mentioned by Torrington they proceeded into a small kitchen and:

"You see," said the Inspector, pointing, "there's a sort of little scullery beyond, with a door opening on to the yard."

Carey nodded, walking through the scullery and out into the yard, which was littered with indescribable rubbish. He stood staring at a door in the wall—the door used by the hunchback.

Inspector Whiteleaf took out a yellow packet from his overcoat pocket, selected a cigarette and lighted it, watching Carey the while. He was a badly mystified man. He had never heard of Douglas Carey in his life and he could not imagine why the Superintendent of his department had detailed him for this early morning duty, which was really no more than that of a guide for this mysterious young man, whom he strongly suspected to be a journalist with unusual influence. At the outset he had been very surly, but he was now recovering his habitual good humour.

"Nothing much here, is there?" he said, tossing a match on the ground.

"Nothing at all," Carey replied, turning to him with a smile. "And what about the upstairs rooms, Inspector?"

"A couple of bedrooms, sir, very ordinary. I overhauled them at three o'clock this morning."

Carey laughed aloud.

"You must think me a dreadful nuisance," he said, "but I am afraid I was responsible!"

"I don't mind, sir," the Inspector declared cheerfully, contemplating the end of his cigarette. "Detectives and firemen can never count on a good night's rest, you know. I shouldn't care a bit if I could see anything to it. But if you'll excuse me saying so, there's neither head nor tail to the job. This woman seems to have been quite respectable; that is to say, the house looks respectable and she has never come on the books of K. Division. There's no suggestion of foul play, no mark of violence; in fact, only one thing puzzles me."

"What is that?" Carey asked, watching him closely.

"Well, sir"—the Inspector blew out a cloud of tobacco smoke—"who gave information of this woman's death?"

Carey nodded, smiling approval.

"Good for you, Inspector," he said. "You know your job."

"Thank you, sir, I hope I do."

"Well," Carey continued, "I am sorry, but I can't tell you that at the moment."

"Oh!" was the Inspector's comment, but the monosyllable conveyed much. This was not a mere journalist, after all. There was more in the case than met the eye. "Do you want to see the upstairs rooms, sir?"

Carey hesitated for a moment, then:

"No," he answered, "I don't think it matters; but I want another look at the sitting room."

They returned, and Carey stood staring about him from wall to wall, from floor to ceiling.

"I regret one thing," he said.

"What is that?" the Inspector asked.

"That the body was moved."

"She wore no jewellery. I particularly noted the fact."

"Are you absolutely certain that there was nothing in either of her hands? Nothing on the floor near where she lay?"

"Nothing," the Inspector returned bluntly. "I was the first to enter the room, sir, and you have seen my notes."

"Then he must have taken it away with him," Carey muttered.

"What's that?" The Inspector started. "*Who* must have taken *what* away with him?"

"Well"—Carey's smile was apologetic—"it's only fair to you to explain, Inspector. The death of this woman, although not important in itself, is a link in a chain of evidence, or so I think, and if my theory is correct, the man we have to find is the man who was with her just before she died."

"Really!" the Inspector exclaimed. "Then it wasn't death from natural causes, after all?"

"I have not said so," Carey pointed out. "Moreover, I may be wrong in my theory. But if I am right, someone came to this house last night and took something away."

"A bit vague, sir!" said the Inspector. "Do you mean stole something? I shouldn't think there was much to steal, personally."

"Neither should I," Carey agreed. "No, I didn't quite mean that. Of course, it's a shame to mystify you like this, but frankly, my hands are tied. You see——"

He hesitated. Detective Inspector Whiteleaf was a decent fellow and a competent officer. Carey was most anxious to explain his position in the matter without offending the Inspector's susceptibilities. Therefore:

"You see," he repeated, "I am acting for Sir John Nevinson in this matter."

"Really, sir!" Inspector Whiteleaf exclaimed with awed, sudden respect.

"Yes," Carey continued, "but don't let the fact disturb you. I merely want to set your mind at rest. It seems a silly business to be turned out in the middle of the night for a case of this kind, but when I tell you that Sir John mentioned your name at once, probably you won't feel so sore about it."

His purpose was served. Detective Inspector Whiteleaf visibly expanded, and:

"Thank you, sir," he said respectfully; "it was good of you to tell me. Pardon my ignorance, but I thought you were a newspaper man. Honestly, I didn't know that the Commissioner even knew my name. What you just said was very good hearing. And now—the next move?"

"Home," Carey replied; "the scent is stale."

And so presently, through an awakening world, the two-seater threaded the outskirts of Dockland, with its visions of ships and shipmen, marine store dealers, and things which spoke of the sea. A string of lorries rattled by, laden with crates and packages upon which the painted words appeared "Via Rangoon"; and here a group of lascars stood outside the door of some large institution. The workers of the great Port of London were afoot.

The seemingly endless Commercial Road set Carey thinking about the Jew—visible link between East and West. Here were descendants of Moses, of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob, who still retained their incredibly ancient biblical names, and here, too, witness of the wanderlust of the race, were Jewish traders who bore names that were Russian, German, and Scottish.

It was a new aspect of a fascinating city, and its romance claimed his mind, temporarily conquering the grey-headed dragon which obsessed him. Warehouses were opening their doors; and he found himself reflecting upon the glamour which belongs to coffee—product of languorous Arabia, wild Java, Jamaica of the buccaneers, and the vague mystery which invests Peru. Spices spoke to his imagination, conjuring up reef-girt palm groves and the coral-haunted shadows of dim lagoons.

Beyond the doors of the Baltic Exchange he saw blue Eastern seas where ships bore cargoes of Oriental stuffs: porcelain, tobacco, gay tropical feathers, tea in quaintly figured chests; or queer little square boxes filled with dream gum from the poppy fields of China.

CHAPTER XIV

THE COMMISSIONER OF METROPOLITAN POLICE

SIR JOHN NEVINSON had "the Service spot," that curious bald patch on the crown said to be the penalty of wearing a tightly fitting cap, flat-topped, for the greater part of each day, year in, year out. Otherwise, he was still young in appearance, a handsome man of that distinctive military type which Great Britain alone produces to perfection.

In India, his record had been excellent; in the field, during the war with Germany, his work had been efficient but not brilliant. Later, in Whitehall, where he had raised the Military Intelligence Department to a state of perfection which at last had baffled the cunning espionage of the enemy, he had come again into his own.

Essentially an administrator, an organizer, General Sir John Nevinson had been clearly marked out for New Scotland Yard. Largely due to this wise appointment was the fact that visiting committees from the famous police of Paris, and from the more distant crime specialists of New York, had come to London to study the flawless machinery installed at the Yard by this masterly placer of the right man in the right job.

One who had known him well (and there were few

who did) must have recognized that this morning he was both puzzled and concerned. He read carefully through a document which lay upon his table, closing his left eye and reading with his right, into which was screwed a powerful monocle. Coming to the last page, he pressed a bell and a man entered waiting for orders.

"Send Mr. Carey in," said the Commissioner.

A few moments later Douglas Carey entered, and:

"Good morning, Carey," said Sir John. "Sit down. Frankly, you have alarmed me. Have you been to Limehouse this morning?"

"I have, Sir John," Carey replied.

"Found anything?"

"No. An autopsy may reveal something, but I have drawn blank."

"I trust your judgment," the Commissioner continued; "otherwise I shouldn't have put you on the job. I acted on your message. Did they all jump to it?"

"Everybody," Carey replied. "Particularly Whiteleaf, a most efficient officer."

"Good," said the Commissioner. "I had marked him, too. But why Limehouse? What's the point? Who is this woman? What has she got to do with the case? And—er——" he hesitated, adjusted his monocle, and turning back to the second page of the manuscript upon the table, said: "What is the meaning of this?" He read aloud: "'I fear that my detailed report to you has fallen into the hands of the criminal we are looking for. I shall make no further report until I have seen you personally.' Eh?" He looked

up. "I was right, then? There *is* a head centre to this business, and he has moved?"

"He has," Carey replied grimly. "He knows all that I know and all that you know. He knows that we suspect his existence."

"Carry on," said Sir John. "Tell me the worst."

"I will," Carey continued. "I spent a week on the material which you supplied to me, Sir John, and I came to the conclusion that the loss of the Moscow-Berlin correspondence from Downing Street, and the theft from Ewart Stephens of his despatches on the Calais-Dover boat, were part of a single plan. I realized, of course, that neither Ewart Stephens nor Lord Brankforth was in any way to blame."

"Yes," Sir John jerked in his rapid fashion; "go ahead."

"I had nothing more accurate than press reports to go upon," Carey continued, "in regard to the Hatton Garden diamond robbery. I took the matter up, as you know—you offered me facilities—and I came to the conclusion that the person responsible for this robbery was also the culprit in these purely political cases."

"Really," Sir John murmured, "this is baffling."

"It *is* baffling," Carey admitted, "but I think I can prove that I am right, and I think, although I am not sure yet, that I can prove the death of this half-caste woman at Limehouse to be due to the same agency."

"Eh?" the Commissioner exclaimed. "A murder! With what object?"

"God knows with what object," said Carey. "I

believe, Sir John, we have a long task before us. It is dreadfully difficult to link these episodes."

"I should call it impossible!" declared the Commissioner. "I believe in you tremendously, Carey, but at the moment I can't follow you. What has the work of jewel thieves to do with the activities of political agents, clearly indicated in the Downing Street matter and in the theft from Ewart Stephens? Finally, why this midnight rumpus in Limehouse? In what way can the death of the wife of a Chinese sailor—for this is the description which I have" (he tapped the document) "of the dead woman—concern this leakage of political secrets? These things belong to different departments. They have no common denominator."

"So I should have thought, Sir John," Carey confessed. "To return to my own case. I had made a detailed report in which, I believe, I had justified my theory that there was a link between each of these seemingly disconnected episodes."

"Your report has not reached me," said Sir John drily.

"No!" Carey stood up. "But it has reached the enemy."

"What!" Sir John exclaimed, and directed upon his visitor that piercing gaze for which he was celebrated and for which he was feared. "Really!"

Carey sat down in the chair again. "I don't know how to begin. It will take me some time to explain, but I think it may be worth your while to hear me out."

"Oh!" Sir John glanced at his table clock. "Fifteen minutes?"

"I will try, Sir John."

Sir John raised the receiver of one of the three telephones upon his table, and:

"I am engaged until eleven," he said. "No one is to interrupt me." He replaced the receiver. "Carry on," he directed; "I am listening."

He lay back in his padded armchair and closed his eyes, allowing the monocle to drop down upon its ribbon. Douglas Carey paused for a moment in order to collect his thoughts, and then began to relate to the Commissioner, striving to be brief, those inexplicable occurrences which latterly had disturbed the tenor of his existence.

Sir John Nevinson did not interrupt him, indeed, did not move, but lay back as if sleeping, whilst Carey told of his careful inquiries, of his analysis of the evidence; of how, at last, he had addressed himself to the task of making a report. The phantasmal part of the affair, or that part which he counted phantasmal, Carey had hesitated to mention, until, coming to his awakening on the night when Ecko, his Japanese servant, had been discovered upon the stair and had made his singular statement, he spoke reluctantly of his impressions. He recounted all he could recall of this singular night during which the detailed report had been stolen from his table.

"The truth, Sir John, when we reach it, will be something outside your experience and mine; something new and terrible. Yet I believe we shall know the truth in the end. The reason of my journey to Limehouse this morning you will hear in a moment, as well as the name of the man who gave information of this woman's death—a question very shrewdly put

to me by Detective Inspector Whiteleaf. When I awoke that night I could remember nothing, absolutely nothing, of my thoughts or my actions during some two hours preceding. I could only remember one thing: a ghostly grey face—the face of a dead man—floating somewhere in space and watching me."

He ceased speaking, silenced by a swift movement on the part of Sir John Nevinson.

The latter sat suddenly upright, clutching the arms of his chair. Then, more slowly, he opened his eyes, as one upon whose mind a great and horrible truth has dawned. He fixed his gaze on Carey, and:

"Stop!" he said. "Stop!" The tone of his voice was harsh, unnatural. "Let me think—let me think."

CHAPTER XV

M. DE TREPNIAK AT HOME

"BUT I am astounded," declared Mrs. Lewisham, "to hear that you have never been to one of M. de Trepniak's Sunday afternoons."

Douglas Carey merely nodded in confirmation of his earlier assurance.

They afforded a strange contrast, these two, seated side by side in Mrs. Lewisham's Rolls Royce. She was accounted one of the smartest women in town, and not to know Mrs. Jack Lewisham was tantamount to an admission of barbarism. She was vivid, with red colouring and a personality to match. She delivered her lightest observations with enormous significance. But, her sentence finished, the fire left her eyes; the word was spoken, the deed was done. She became instantly passive, as if resting, recovering strength for her next intense remark.

Carey, on the contrary, was most expressive when silent. He spoke in an almost even monotone and his gestures were more eloquent than his tongue. Now, he watched his companion, smiling whimsically at her enthusiasm. He had welcomed this opportunity of penetrating into the mystery house of Park Lane. But he was fully aware that it would never have been his, had not Fate—for he was of those who know

Chance a myth—literally precipitated Trepniak upon himself and Mrs. Lewisham whilst they stood talking one morning at the corner of Bruton Street.

A skidding car had been the instrument of the gods, and Trepniak, who evidently wished Mrs. Lewisham to be present, could not well exclude Carey from the invitation. Accordingly, he had presented himself at the flat in Mount Street; and since, if Mrs. Lewisham had been calling upon someone next door she would have had the car in waiting, he now found himself seated beside her bound for Trepniak's house in Park Lane, just around the corner, upon a delightful afternoon when a walk was clearly indicated.

"My dear"—Mrs. Lewisham addressed everyone as "my dear," sometimes so far forgetting herself as to call hotel waiters and other people's butlers in this way—"My dear"—she laid her hand upon his knee—"three weeks ago—I think it was three weeks ago—he positively electrified everybody. He is a natural showman, you know, but most delightful. If he had not been a Russian nobleman, or an anarchist, or whatever he is, I am positive he would have been Mr.—what's the name of the man who cannot be locked up?"

Carey, badly puzzled, shook his head. Then:

"Well," he replied, "*I* cannot be locked up, legally."

"Oh, my dear!" Mrs. Lewisham pushed him playfully—"How silly! I mean the man who used to break out of everywhere and be manacled, and defy everyone and everything, and break out of jail, and all that."

"You possibly mean Houdini?" Carey suggested.

"Of course!" cried Mrs. Lewisham. "How forgetful of me! Well, what was I saying? Oh, yes. Three weeks ago he amused us at his house by showing that a man can be in two places at once."

"Really?" said Carey. "It sounds intriguing."

"Oh, it was most intriguing, my dear. I can't describe what he did, but it was perfectly impossible. And here we are. There will be all sorts of interesting people, but you must make him show us something extraordinary. Sometimes he doesn't, unless he is pressed."

With mingled feelings Carey entered the house of Trepniak. The butler was rather disappointing, for his dress was severely correct. But he was a strange-looking man, stout, and with a dull yellow complexion. His hair was black and closely cropped, and he wore side-whiskers, also closely cropped, so that they appeared to have been painted upon his yellow face.

In regard to the house itself, Muir Torrington's words leapt to Carey's mind: "Imagine illustrations by Sidney Sime of some of the worst nightmares of Edgar Allan Poe." Such eccentricities could only be a pose. It was, as Torrington had said, "shop window." Nevertheless, it was so strangely different from anything he had seen, that Carey found himself nonplussed.

The pictures were palpably modern—ultra modern—but the furniture, whilst some of it appeared to be antique, belonged to no known period—to no recognized school. He had never seen such furniture. Indeed, there was nothing in the house of which one might have said, "Ah! a Greuze; this is Chippendale; this, a Persian carpet; here, a Chinese vase." Nothing

in the place was definable, so that at first Carey found himself unable to analyze his impressions.

Strangeness was their keynote. Everything was bizarre, unusual, created an uncomfortable sense of unreality; so that he forced his mind to seek some solution; and, at last, the solution came.

There was not one familiar object in Trepniak's house. Down to the ash trays this singularity was carried. He had never seen such ash trays before. The very wallpaper was different—in some of the rooms, hideously different from anything in his experience. The ceilings were not white, nor even painted with figure subjects sometimes met with. They were either canopied with unique material or coloured green or red or purple. In one small room there was a black ceiling. Yet it was not laughable —it was a demented house.

On the one hand, it reminded him of futuristic scenery in some lavishly mounted stage entertainment, but, on the other hand, its collective effect was almost awesome. It bore the impress of the perverted mind which had called it into being. It was as unrestful as an opium dream. In vain one sought for something familiar, for something which might be catalogued, fittingly placed in the niche where it belonged in the history of its kind. In the drawing room, or rather, in an apartment which resembled a scene from Beckford's *Vathek*, quite a number of well-known people were assembled.

Carey knew many of them. Science and the Arts were represented, but he was somewhat surprised to recognize several members of the Court circle. He began to remodel his estimate of Trepniak. That

the man was a charlatan, he was more than ever assured. At the source of his wealth he could not even guess. Carey possessed a trained imagination, and his mind faltered in contemplating the task of equipping *uniquely* this big house from cellar to roof. It may please a wealthy man to have a carpet woven and designed to his own pattern, to possess a unique tea service, a unique set of furniture, but when everything, great and small, conforms to this specification, that "its like shall not be," the scheme transcends eccentricity; it ceases to be *nouveau riche* bad taste and becomes monstrous.

There was power here, not only of wealth, but of mind; force, perverted, but to be felt in the very atmosphere. The wealth and the madness of Nero could have accomplished no more, had Nero lived in London. Rumour of it had reached him through channels frivolous and serious, snobbish and cynical. He had wondered and doubted. But the reality swept doubt aside. Wonder remained—and something more.

Trepniak, moving from group to group, was dressed with strict propriety, but the ivory pallor of the man's skin, accentuated by the strange dull red of his closely curling hair growing right down on to his cheek-bones, must have marked him out in any assembly; this, and an impression of intense virility which every movement proclaimed.

His gestures were few but rapid. He walked with nervous, short strides, glancing swiftly from face to face as he talked. The voice was slightly guttural and sometimes he groped for words, giving to certain syllables a curiously Teutonic value. Carey welcomed

the opportunity of studying more closely this man with whose life Fate had clearly decreed his own should be interwoven.

Trepniak crossed swiftly to greet the new arrivals. His strange greenish-brown eyes fixed themselves upon Carey, and then, their glance darting swiftly to the face of Mrs. Lewisham, he spoke some conventional words of welcome, bending over her hand in un-English fashion. He turned again to her companion, and:

"My dear Mr. Carey," he said, "it is a pleasure to welcome you here. Why you have never come before I do not know. I hope you will come often again."

"Thanks," Carey replied, fascinated against his will by this singular charlatan.

Trepniak, moving swiftly away to meet someone else, and Mrs. Lewisham darting upon a tall young grenadier, Carey found himself alone. At this moment a hand touched his sleeve, and, turning, he found himself face to face with Madame Sabinov.

Most complex emotions claimed him. He had reason to believe that this woman was an instrument of the enemy, of that enemy whose gigantic power for evil was slowly unfolding itself. Yet she was one whose strange beauty seemed appropriate in that house of unusual things. Her brilliant, sombre eyes watched him unmoved. She was simply but perfectly dressed in a sheath-like gown of black velvet and wore a large drooping hat like that of a Musketeer. She was an object of much interest in the lofty but gloomily appointed saloon; and Carey, whose modesty Muir Torrington had frequently assured him would lead to his downfall, knew that because she had singled him out

he also would now become the subject of many inquiries.

"You did not call upon me as you promised," she said softly. "I suppose you have been too busy."

"I am sorry," he replied, "but I have been extremely busy lately, yes."

She continued to watch him, smiling slightly, and:

"Shall we sit down somewhere?" she suggested. "I believe M. de Trepniak is going to amuse us."

They found a seat and were served with tea by one of several attendants who conformed to the rule of the household in being entirely different from any one else's servants. They were Nubians, and wore black uniforms resembling tightly fitting cassocks buttoning right up to the chin, black trousers, and red Arab slippers with upturned points. Upon their heads were closely fitting red turbans.

Their strangeness was not confined to their dress, however, for they were apparently mutes. The crop-headed butler, a perfectly trained major-domo, hovered around, supervising. He spoke excellent English, was deferential, solicitous, but never looked any one in the eyes.

Carey, who had found the situation somewhat exacting, began to recover his composure. Madame Sabinov, gracefully languid, was a charming talker. He distrusted her intensely, the more so since she obviously sought to please. Yet he was keenly alive to the allurement of this woman, whose life, like the life of Trepniak, was a mystery.

They drank some fragrant kind of China tea from little crystal cups unlike any he had seen before.

"This is my first visit to M. de Trepniak's house," he said.

"And does it surprise you?"

"Intensely," he admitted. "Everything in it appears to be unique."

Madame Sabinov laughed.

"Not only unique, but frequently in execrable taste," she added. "I thought you knew? I thought everyone knew."

"Knew what?" Carey asked curiously.

"About Trepniak's mode of life. Of course he is a millionaire, although I have no idea, no one has any idea, of the source of his millions. In addition, I think he must be mad. Just look at this room. Is it not a nightmare?"

"Well——" Carey hesitated, looking about him. "It is very Futuristic."

"Can you imagine," Madame Sabinov continued, "what the cost must be of annually replacing everything in such a house as this?"

"I am afraid I don't follow," said Carey. "Replacing everything? Why should everything be replaced?"

Madame Sabinov shrugged her shoulders. "Why, indeed?" she murmured. "Nevertheless, it is. And they are not merely replaced by duplicates." She laughed at Carey's growing bewilderment, and, taking up one of the curious cups: "To illustrate," she continued, "this tea service was designed and made solely for his use. The designs and moulds and whatever things they use were then destroyed." She put the cup down again. "The same applies to every

carpet on the floor, every curtain, every table, every chair."

"But," Carey exclaimed, "You don't mean——"

"But," she took him up, laughingly, "I *do* mean! Everything in this house has been specially designed for M. de Trepniak. Nothing in the place—or at least in that part of it with which I am familiar—is more than one year old. Nothing in the house has its duplicate anywhere in the world; and once a year the entire scheme is changed, from the teaspoons to the dining-room table."

"You mean," Carey said, wondering if he heard aright, "that Trepniak has an annual sale of all his possessions?"

"Not at all." Madame Sabinov laid her hand on his arm, checking him. "These irreplaceable objects, many of which are hideous, some of which are beautiful, since all were designed by clever artists, are destroyed, and new designs take their places. But, *ssh!* Our host has something to say."

CHAPTER XVI

MAGIC IN PARK LANE

TREPNIAK stood at the end of the room before blue velvet curtains embroidered with white peacocks. It seemed to Carey that at last the showman was frankly revealing himself. Yet there was more in this madness than the caprice of a vulgarian newly enriched. He watched the man closely as the chatter of conversation died away. He became absorbed as in the action of some powerful, mysterious drama. Then:

"My dear friends," Trepniak began, "I have been challenged. Mrs. Lewisham has succeeded in convincing Lord Evershead"—glancing rapidly in that nobleman's direction—"that three weeks ago miracles were performed in this room. His lordship is naturally skeptical, and has called upon me to make good Mrs. Lewisham's words. This, I fear, I cannot do. There are no such things as miracles, but there is Science; and one who has made Science his mistress may demand from her phenomena seemingly miraculous. If I have any mission in life it is to show that nothing is impossible. But I ask you to remember that I only seek to amuse. It is my privilege, since you are my guests. I make no claims. I have no cause to urge. There are those who sit in darkness around a table calling for

raps and movements. When they get them, they say, 'The spirits are here.' Voices speak; and they say, 'It is Uncle John. It is Cousin William.' I ask for no darkness, no tables, no rappings, no mediums. I, too, will call up voices, but, though you may recognize them, do not, I beg of you, say 'it is Uncle John, it is Cousin William.' It will not be; it will be illusion. To-day a man may sit in London and talk to a man in New York. It is not a miracle, but it is an illusion —an illusion of Science. It is done by machinery, machinery made with human hands. One day it will be done by the most perfect machine in the world— a machine not made by human hands: man's brain."

Trepniak bowed and the curtain was silently opened behind him revealing a small inner room flatly draped with white peacocks upon blue velvet. It was unfurnished except for a large brass bottle of peculiar shape which stood upon the dark blue carpet. Trepniak took up this bottle and threw back the stopper, which was hinged.

"I admit that I am a conjurer and not a wizard," he said. "I should like everyone to examine this vessel."

He handed it to the yellow-faced butler, and it was carried around the room.

"Please tell us its history," Mrs. Lewisham cried. "Is it very old?"

"Ah!" Trepniak performed one of his quick gestures. "Its history I am not prepared to tell you. I am so sorry."

"Oh, how disappointing!" Mrs. Lewisham exclaimed.

Madame Sabinov, lying back in her cushioned seat,

did not even remove her cigarette as Carey rapidly examined the bottle. It appeared to be of Indian ware although it possessed unusual features. Finally, it was returned to Trepniak; and, setting it down upon the carpet:

"This," he said, "is my receiver. In one important respect it is superior to any other in existence. Thus, if you wish to hear the President of the United States speaking in Washington, you shall hear him. He is only a few thousand miles away. But also, if you wish to hear Cicero speaking in the Roman Senate, you shall do so; for he is only two thousand years away."

"I shall try to prove to you that what has been, *is*. Here, in London, New York is not speaking when you hear New York. New York *has* spoken. You listen to what is past. Indeed, the speaker may be dead before his words reach you. It is a question of adjustment. Savonarola is not speaking; but Savonarola *has* spoken. He spoke into Nature's transmitter—the air."

He paused, searching the room with his strange eyes, challengingly; but there was absolute silence. He continued:

"I have said that I am not a wizard, and so the power of my receiver is limited by the present state of my knowledge. You may listen to someone who died last night, but you can only hear what he actually said before he died. You may listen to what Sun Yat Sen said in China last April. Thus I can go back, as I have said, to Cicero, and further, considerably further. Space I have quite conquered. I can speak to Australia. Time, I have partially conquered; and dimly,

very dimly, I can get the music of the Eleusinian Mysteries at the opening of the Temple of Ictinus. Ladies and gentlemen, make your choice. Sometimes I shall fail, as the most perfect receiving set fails; but often I shall succeed."

Trepniak's request was not complied with. Some there were who thought him mad, some who thought that he jested. Collectively, his audience was staggered. Therefore:

"Allow me to encourage you," said Trepniak. "There are those present, I know, to whom the voice of His Majesty the King is familiar. I shall now reveal a secret of Buckingham Palace. You shall listen to his reception of the first Labour Cabinet ever formed in this country."

The silence in that saloon grew so intense as to remind Carey of the stillness in the heart of the Great Pyramid, but it was charged with human thought. It was electrical; it was unforgettable.

The room overlooked Park Lane, although this fact was concealed by its distorted appointments, but Sunday in London is a muted day, and few sounds rose from the Lane to break that quite peculiar stillness.

Trepniak placed the brass bottle in front of him, looked around for a moment and then, stooping, slowly raised the lid. Somewhere, apparently among the company, a voice began to speak—and suddenly, at the back of a group far down the room, a man stood up. A while the courteous voice went on, a little tired, a little hesitant; then, stooping again, Trepniak closed the lid of the bottle. Instantly the voice ceased, cut off in the middle of a sentence.

Trepniak looked around him again challengingly.

"Forgive a seeming discourtesy," he said, "but those words were not meant for your ears nor for mine. I think"—fixing his gaze upon the man who had stood up at the end of the room—"there is someone here who recognized them."

"*I* recognized them," came the answer. "They were His Majesty's words. I was present. It was the King's voice!"

Silence fell again. And:

"This first simple experiment," Trepniak continued, "was intended to establish my bona-fides, since, in the case of more remote calls, no such check will be possible. I shall ask you now to be very silent. You will be rewarded by hearing one of the most glorious hymns ever composed by man."

His request was obeyed. Carey imagined that he could hear his heart beating. Madame Sabinov laid her cigarette in an ash tray.

Amid this intense hush Trepniak stooped again, paused curiously, and then a second time raised the lid of the brass bottle. As if coming from some little distance away, from another room or from the Lane outside, a high, sustained tenor note sounded sweetly, and ceased. Upon it followed a strange harmony of stringed instruments, a purposeful but unfamiliar chord of music. The golden voice was heard again, the same open vowel, the same sustained note, and again came the interval chord struck upon many strings.

But now, exquisite in its unfamiliar beauty, so that tears leapt to the eyes of many who listened, came a choir of women's voices, pure as a running stream, singing in

a time to have baffled any living musical director, yet surely, flawlessly. The voices died away, like music borne upon a breeze, until only one sustained the strange melody. Under it, a murmurous accompaniment, ran the notes of reed instruments. The tenor voice joined it. Both ceased; and a harmony of strings closed the passage.

A silent interval, then, as the dream of some great musician transmuted into sound, came a mighty chorus, triumphant, exultant, of a quality unknown to the laws of modern music, swelling to an almost insufferable grandeur, and finishing upon a note of majesty which seemed to reach to Carey's very soul and to shake it like a reed.

Trepniak was standing upright, facing his audience again.

"The Hymn to the Rising Sun," he said, "sung in the great Temple of Thebes on the morning that Seti the First came to the throne of Egypt, thirteen hundred and sixty years before Christ."

CHAPTER XVII

THE WHITE PAVILION

DOUGLAS CAREY stepped out of the elevator and looked around him with a surprise which he was quite unable to conceal. Madame Sabinov laughed softly.

"What astonishes you?" she asked; "my white room?"

Carey turned to her, and his astonishment increased. Where he had thought to find a door there was nothing but a plain panel of the same unfamiliar silky white wood in which the apartment was carried out. Against it the black-sheathed figure of Madame Sabinov resembled an ebony statue.

She had removed her hat and a sort of cape which had formed part of her costume. The lithe black figure, the youthful, taunting beauty of her face, crowned with snowy hair, set his imagination on fire. Then his sense of humour awoke. He likened that charming head to a large powder-puff.

"You are smiling," she said.

"Yes," he replied. "You are very wonderful, and so is your room."

Indeed, it was worthy of his description. It was square, and panelled with white wood of a kind which Carey had never met with before. Its carved ceiling

was dome-shaped, and the floor was completely covered with a plain golden carpet which possessed a sheen like that of human hair. There were some delicate etchings, gold-framed, some curious gilt furniture of very slender design, books and flowers, and a large antique harp.

These things, however, had not occasioned his astonishment. It had been due to the fact that the room possessed neither doors nor windows, but nevertheless was warmly illuminated as if by reflected sunlight.

Madame Sabinov seated herself in a long rest chair and lighted a cigarette, for she smoked almost continuously.

"You think this"—she waved her white hand—"an affectation, I suppose?"

Carey, seated near her, glanced around him with a certain embarrassment; but before he had time to reply:

"Well, so it is," she added, "and nearly every room in the house is equally preposterous, although some are quite beautiful."

"This room is beautiful," said Carey hastily, "but most unusual."

"Yes," Madame Sabinov's eyes turned slowly to right and left, languidly surveying the apartment. "A freak of the man who had this great big house reconstructed from cellar to roof."

"By whom was this done?" Carey asked.

"By M. de Trepniak," Madame replied simply. "This house was formerly his. He was good enough to make me a present of it. Please smoke. I know you don't like these amber things, but there are some perfectly good Virginians in the box at your elbow."

Carey's former embarrassment returned tenfold. He took a cigarette and lighted it, whilst Madame watched him through half-lowered lashes. He was not quite at one with his conscience respecting the motive which had prompted him to accept her invitation. Mrs. Lewisham had early dismissed him in favour of the Guardsman, and, having escorted Madame Sabinov to her house:

"Are you in a hurry, or will you stay and talk to me for a while?" she had said.

Now, here he sat in this curious white saloon. He was really anxious to learn if this woman had left the little ebony Buddha upon his table; but he could have asked her outright at Trepniak's. She was very alluring, very mysterious, and unless he had grossly misunderstood her, was living under the protection of the man whose home they had recently left.

He recognized that he had been silent too long, and, turning to Madame, he found the gaze of her sombre eyes set fixedly upon him. There was something in those long eyes which reminded him of night, of Eastern night; her lips were smiling, though.

"I had not realized that you were old friends," he said, rather awkwardly.

"No?" she murmured, continuing to watch him. "Well, we are not such very old friends. We met in Paris a year ago, and"—she shrugged her shoulders —"drifted together. Do I shock you just a little bit?"

"Not at all. Why should I be shocked?"

"Oh, I don't know," she answered, "there are so many Registrars in the world, you see. One friend of

mine has been married five times—by which I mean that she has been divorced four times. I have been married once, only because"—she paused slightly—"he wished it. Yet my friend is received everywhere, and I am not. But I have no country of my own, so why should I conform to the customs of those I visit? And I have no religion. I was never taught one. So why should I pretend to respect what I cannot understand?"

She shrugged her shoulders again.

"No," Carey replied, and found himself wondering about her nationality as others had done before him.

Her English was perfect, far better than that spoken by Trepniak, but at times, although it was elusive, he had detected a faint and unfamiliar accent, an oddness of intonation. She was very elegant and possessed of a most unusual personality.

A tiny warning voice spoke to him. Already, someone, that powerful hidden enemy whom in vain he had sought to unmask, had linked their names. The rumour had reached Jasmine's ears. Already, though guiltless, he had known sorrow because of this woman.

A sweet-toned bell, apparently in some neighbouring room, struck the hour of six. He determined to take his leave. Madame Sabinov was toying with a little ornament which she held in her hand; and fascinated by the movements of the slender white fingers, Carey suddenly bethought him of the motive, or what he believed to be the motive, of his visit.

He raised his eyes, meeting her glance again, for she had never ceased to watch him, and he became aware of a sudden distrust of himself.

His ideas changed abruptly, unaccountably. How beautiful she was. He became possessed of an insane desire to make love to her, and she, as if reading his glance aright, imparted to her slow smile such a quality of allurement that it became an invitation.

"Must you leave me?" she said very softly.

At that, his self-possession deserted him. He was carried out of himself by such a great surge of longing as he had never known even in his dreams of Jasmine. He found himself kneeling upon the golden carpet beside her, his lips pressed passionately to her hand, his arm about her waist.

"Not if you tell me to stay, Poppæa," he said, brokenly.

Why he thus addressed her, he knew no more than he knew how this sudden desire had overpowered him, drugged him, made him drunk with longing. He could not remember where he had heard her name. He only knew that some part of his nature which had slept so soundly as to have played no rôle in his life had sprung up like a devouring flame in answer to that voluptuous smile.

He was mad for her kisses, for the clasp of her slender hands. He would have bought her love with death and counted the price a light one.

As if answering to that fire within him, she bent forward, lightly throwing her arm around his shoulders. He sought to reach her lips but she drew back, shaking her head.

"This is madness," she whispered.

But Carey grasped her hand again, which now she had clenched, and began to unlock the delicate fingers,

pouring out wild, strange words of love, unfamiliar upon his tongue, unfamiliar in his own ears. Automatically, perhaps unconsciously, she was clutching a little jade amulet, but at last her fingers relaxed and it dropped upon the carpet.

As it fell, Madame Sabinov's eyes, which had remained half veiled by their long lashes, opened slowly, widely. Their slumbrous, taunting expression left them. They became glittering, curiously speckled with gold, like the eyes of an awakening animal. This new glance chilled the man who knelt at her feet.

She withdrew her hand from his grasp, not violently, but deliberately, purposefully, watching him now in a different way. This was another woman. Surely those firm lips were incapable of wanton smiles. Carey drew back and then stood up. Passion had swept over him like a tidal wave. Now like a tidal wave it receded, leaving him cold, abashed, amazed. He clenched his fists convulsively. What madness had possessed him? He uttered a groan like that of a soul condemned.

Madame Sabinov rose from her long chair and confronted him. Awhile she watched him almost wildly, searching his face, which had grown pale. Then she looked about the saloon as if she found her surroundings utterly unfamiliar. Carey did not speak. Finally her gaze came back to him again, and at last she spoke. The words were simple enough, yet they chilled her hearer uncannily, as the touch of something strange.

"How long have we been here?" she whispered.

For a moment he could not answer. Then:

"Forgive me," he said, his voice unsteady for he

was still shaken by the storm which had swept over him, "but I don't think I understand."

The expression in Madame Sabinov's beautiful eyes grew even more strange, wilder.

"Please answer me," she implored. "Answer me! How long have we been here?"

CHAPTER XVIII

AT THE ATHENÆUM

"FOR instance," said Sir Provost Hope, "the Athenæum, for a hundred years sacred to the lords of creation, now bows to a feminist age and we behold the phenomenon of a Ladies' Night."

Muir Torrington laughed in his sudden, boisterous fashion, and one member who had dined with Charles Dickens turned round and endeavoured to obtain a better view of his features. Torrington's bump of veneration was not conspicuous, but Provost Hope knew the real worth of the man, and could afford to overlook his obvious peculiarities.

"Whenever I find myself puzzled," he continued, "by a man's symptoms, I invariably seek another opinion."

"Indeed," said Torrington; "whose opinion?"

"The opinion of the woman he is in love with. It is a policy as ancient as civilization, Torrington. If for some reason history had failed to record the existence of Cleopatra, for instance, what could we have made, now, of the tragedy of Mark Antony? I sent Jasmine down to my sister's place in Surrey because I believed that the author of Carey's extraordinary experiences was in love with, or at least infatuated by, my daughter."

"You hoped to draw him?" suggested Torrington.

"Yes," Sir Provost nodded. "But I have failed. No

fewer than twelve men of her acquaintance have either called or telephoned to enquire what has become of her, but although I 'phone her every evening, only two of the twelve, I learn, have got as far as Low Ketley."

"Do I know them?" Torrington asked.

"Young Baxter is one," Sir Provost answered, "Lord Amberley's younger son, and the other is Dugdale, whose father was at Edinburgh with me."

"Ah!" said Torrington, "good, harmless lads. Yes, you have failed, as you say. Of course, you understand why Carey has kept away. Those two are just crazy about one another; I have watched them together. There has been a misunderstanding—she has sent him off with a flea in his ear; and it's just a question of which holds out the longer, his Irish vanity or her Scottish pride."

Sir Provost laughed heartily but silently. Then:

"A Scotsman spoke there, Torrington!" he declared. "I like your nice discrimination. However, what you say is substantially true. This does not worry me. But more and more my attention is being drawn to the man Trepniak. You have told me things which simply cry out for enquiry. I have heard other things even stranger, but at second hand. The result of the post mortem on this woman in Limehouse is not known yet, I take it?"

"Not yet," Torrington answered. "I am watching that case very closely."

"I gather," said Sir Provost, "that since Carey deposited the ebony Buddha at his bank, which I believe you told me he had done, there has been no recurrence of the trouble of which he complained?"

"None," was the reply. "This sort of thing baffles me entirely. How by all that's holy a little figure can send a man to sleep and while he is asleep make him do things of which he's unaware when he wakes up, passes my comprehension. But I am open to learn, and certainly, Sir Provost, your diagnosis appears to have been correct. I have urged Carey to cultivate Madame Sabinov and to find out, if possible, where this figure came from, assuming, of course, that she really left it in his rooms."

"And has he done so?"

"I can't say," Torrington returned, "I haven't seen him for a day or so. But I rather gathered from a remark of yours at dinner that the mysterious Madame Sabinov had been to consult you?"

"She has," Sir Provost answered. "But in one respect she remains as mysterious as ever."

"Really!" Torrington bent forward, keenly interested. "And did she allow you to 'put her to the question'?"

Sir Provost smiled.

"She came to me for hypnotic treatment," he replied, "yes."

"And was it successful?"

"Only partially. She is a woman of personality, possessed of a powerful will, and therefore her submission was complete. Well—" he looked around him and drew his chair closer to that occupied by Torrington—"it appears to me that we are in this thing together, therefore let us pool our knowledge, compare notes, and see what we can make of it all."

The psychologist closed his eyes for a moment, a

familiar mannerism, mentally reviewing the facts which he had learned from Madame Sabinov during the time that she had submitted herself to hypnotic examination.

Her history was strange enough. Famous in three capitals for her beauty, Madame Sabinov owed her existence to the infatuation of an Austrian Archduke for a lovely Georgian, an exquisite flower nurtured in the *harêm* of Abdûl Azîz, but cast out upon the callous stream of life when the assassination of that Sultan broke up his household. Orphaned in infancy, the reputed adventures of the woman now known as Poppæa Sabinov qualified her for a niche in the history of the great courtesans.

Her marriage to Count Michael Sabinov, a brilliant cavalry officer attached to the staff of the Grand Duke Nicholas, might have ended her adventures, for it was a love match, but Fate, who has many uses for beautiful women, stepped in. Her husband disappeared in the Russian débâcle, and, as had been the lot of her mother before her, she found herself cast upon the world with nothing but her beauty to barter.

It was an asset which led her from splendour to splendour, capital to capital. Immoral, in the real sense of the word, she was not. Similarly circumstanced, almost any woman so nurtured, and endowed with her attributes, might have followed a like course. All these things, in his quest for the source of the influence of which his patient complained, Sir Provost had learned. But he did not choose to impart them to Torrington. Therefore:

"I gathered many things about her," he said, opening his eyes and regarding the other in that searching,

disconcerting way which even Torrington could never suffer unmoved. "Madame Sabinov has strength of character. She also has beauty, but in no greater degree than many women who are wholly uninteresting. She is, of course, an unusual type, and because of this and of her outstanding personality, fables have grown up respecting her life. That she lives luxuriously, I do not doubt. That she has sinned against the ordinary code of morals, I do not deny. But the thing which is of interest to both of us is this: I had no difficulty whatever in getting her to answer my questions respecting her early life. My first difficulty occurred in questioning her about Paris, where she seems to have lived for some time before she came to London."

"You mean," Torrington suggested, "that she would not answer?"

"I mean nothing of the kind," was the reply; "I mean that *she could not* answer. Torrington, in this respect the case was unique. She was absolutely passive, as completely under my control as any patient I have ever treated. Yet, on certain points—and the first of these arose when my questions approached her life in Paris—she was silent. I could feel, literally *feel* another will imposing silence upon her. Realizing this, I almost forgot my patient for a time. It developed into a battle of wills; but I was defeated. I had to withdraw."

"Why?" Torrington asked eagerly.

"Well"—Sir Provost hesitated—"the woman's sanity was at stake. The human brain is the most delicate machine of which we have knowledge. One cannot

make it a battle-ground with impunity. Therefore I accepted defeat and awakened her."

"I take it she was unconscious of all that had happened?"

"Perfectly," Sir Provost replied. "She was merely anxious to know one thing."

"What was that?"

"The one thing I had failed to learn. You see, Torrington—and here our mystery deepens—Madame Sabinov had come to me because she had recognized the presence of this control, this tremendous control with which I came in conflict when I endeavoured to question her about her Paris life."

"Then do I understand," said Torrington amazedly, "that she is a victim and not an agent of the enemy?"

Sir Provost shook his head blankly.

"I don't know," he replied. "A willing victim becomes an accomplice. Madame Sabinov is a clever woman. I am not satisfied that her consulting me was voluntary, or that her reason for doing so was the reason which she gave. Torrington"—he rested his hand upon the other's knee—"we must stand together, all of us. There is some power very closely allied to Hell actively at work in London."

CHAPTER XIX

THE MAN IN THE ARCADE

"DON'T look around, Doctor Torrington. My life may be at stake, and I count on you."

Muir Torrington started, repressed his first and natural instinct to disobey the voice, and then, detecting real human appeal in the latter, continued to stroll unconcernedly ahead, neither hastening nor slackening his pace.

The Burlington Arcade was crowded, for the hour was eleven on a fine autumn morning.

Snatches of frivolous chatter reached his ears from the well-dressed women and men about him, so that the edge was taken off the strangeness of the thing by the presence of so much that was lightly commonplace.

"Listen, please," the voice continued. It was a cultured voice. Torrington was much intrigued by the faint accent of the speaker, who evidently was walking close behind him. "Stop by that window full of walking sticks. Please slow up near the door and I will bump against you and go into the shop. Do not notice me. I shall leave a small parcel in your hand —your left hand. Put it in your pocket and stroll along. I can find your address in the telephone directory and I will call to-night between eleven and twelve, if I may, and recover my property."

This extraordinary speech had not been delivered uninterruptedly. On several occasions the unseen speaker had paused when passers-by drew near, but he had completed his singular request within five paces of the shop indicated.

Torrington, subjecting a burning curiosity to a rigorous discipline, paused by the window. As he did so, a man brushed against him, thrust a small packet into his hand, and disappeared within the shop. Torrington could secure no more than a glimpse of his face.

The impression was that of a handsome man, of foreign appearance, less than middle-aged but somewhat haggard, who carried himself like a soldier, and whose outstanding characteristic was his aura of aristocracy. The packet, which was wrapped in brown paper, and which from its feel, size, and weight might have contained twenty cigarettes, Torrington slipped into his trouser pocket, and, allowing his hand to remain there, he stared reflectively at the wares in the window for a moment, and then proceeded on his way.

At a hosier's on the other side of the Arcade he took pause again, at the same time seizing the opportunity to learn if his swift manœuvring with the unknown had passed unobserved.

In the persons and behaviour of those people immediately behind him he could perceive nothing suspicious. Here were modistes' assistants, ladies of fashion, elderly gentlemen endowed with genial smiles and much leisure, younger gentlemen whose hours would seem to be as lightly occupied as his own, but whose seeming careless prosperity may also have been as illusive as his own. For Muir Torrington, a young and un-

known practitioner, had boldly plunged into practice in the heart of fashionable London and was at times hard put to it to make ends meet.

However, there was no one resembling the traditional detective, yet he felt a guilty flush rising to his brow at the thought that he might have allowed himself to become accomplice of a dope purveyor. Publicity of this kind he did not desire. The theory was unsatisfactory, however. He knew humanity. Upon his knowledge of humanity he had staked his career; and the stranger who had so strangely enlisted his aid certainly had been no crook. He was not English, but he was a gentleman.

This adventure was of a sort which appealed to the very soul of Muir Torrington. Sure that he was free from observation, he began slowly to retrace his steps. He had almost gained the shop of the dealer in walking sticks when the owner of the mysterious parcel came out as hurriedly as he had gone in. The accuracy of Torrington's estimate of the man was confirmed by a second glimpse which he had of him. This was one haunted by dreadful memories, but one who had never stooped to meanness.

He paused and glanced quickly around him but failed to observe Torrington. His face was pale and wore a sort of hunted look. Turning, he made off in the direction of Burlington Street—and a big, heavily built man, who had been staring in the window of the shop, grasped his arm as he passed. Words were exchanged between the two, both seeming to be very angry, and finally they proceeded along together, the big man holding the other's arm insistently.

Torrington followed to the end of the Arcade, and was in time to see the pair driven off together in a limousine which waited. Heedless of the throng about him, he stood staring after the car, and:

"Well, I'm damned!" he exclaimed.

"Don't say that, Torrington!" came a laughing voice.

Aroused from his reverie, Torrington turned sharply —and found himself looking into the face of Douglas Carey.

"Good heavens, Carey," he said vaguely, extending his hand, "I am delighted to see you."

"You don't look delighted."

"Sorry, but I have had a shock."

"What? Aren't things too bright and breezy?"

"No, but that's not what I mean."

"You certainly look dazed," Carey admitted with concern. "The hour is early but my rooms are near. What do you say to a bad habit before twelve o'clock?"

"I fall."

A few minutes later, from the depths of a comfortable armchair, Torrington watched Ecko shaking cocktails with all the skill of a Western Ocean purser. Gingerly he touched the packet in his trouser pocket. Its tangibility was reassuring. The episodes of the morning were not due to a disordered intelligence. Confidence regained:

"It's an odd world, lad," he said, looking about him.

"Not so bad," Carey replied, as Ecko shared the result of his exertions fairly between two glasses. He suppressed a sigh. "Humanity falls a little short of one's ideals, though."

"I agree," Torrington groaned, sipping his cocktail and watching the departure of the smiling Japanese. A mental picture of the face of his bank manager arose reproachfully, for he had been returning from a visit to that official at the time of his encounter in the Arcade.

"If only we could be born without vices, Carey, it would be plain sailing."

"I didn't think that you had any."

"Ah! but I have, my lad. My vice is optimism, and it's more dangerous than wine, woman, and song put together. But, after all, the secret of happiness is to meet our vices halfway. Many of us waste energy in trying to conquer them. I am a shocking believer. Above all, I believe in myself—in my judgment. Just listen to this."

And, in his own whimsical fashion, he outlined to Carey the episode of the Arcade, concluding by jumping up, drawing the packet from his pocket, and laying it upon the table beside him.

"Behold!" he cried. "And now, what is the answer?"

"Well!" Carey stared amazedly. "You say the chap was a foreigner?"

"Undoubtedly, but he was 'one of us.' He was 'right,' Carey, he was 'right.' I would stake my life on it."

"Hm!" Carey muttered. "Torrington."

"Yes?"

"It's dope!"

"You are wrong. This was no dope merchant. He was a pedigree bird from beak to tail."

Both men stared reflectively at the parcel upon the table. Then:

"What about the big fellow?" Carey asked. "What did he look like?"

"I never once saw his face. Oh! as I have told you before, I'm a poorish detective. I shall pick it up in time, but I have a long way to go. He looked respectable, but not a nobleman."

Carey smoked thoughtfully for a while. Torrington glanced at his watch and finished the cocktail.

"Speaking of detectives," said Carey, "you don't think he was one?"

"Ah!" Torrington leapt to his feet, raising his clenched hand dramatically. "By Gad, Carey, I believe you've hit it! Why didn't I take in his feet!"

"I am sure I have hit it."

"Then you think my man won't turn up to-night?"

"I am willing to bet you a fiver he won't."

"Carey, lad"—Muir Torrington's face became very grim—"if he doesn't, I have one thing to say. It will be because he *can't!* He meant to, I'll swear to it."

"That is for you to judge," Carey replied. "I can only hazard a guess."

"What are you doing to-night?"

"Nothing in particular—loose end."

"Good!" cried Torrington, banging his fist upon a table. "He said between eleven and twelve—a late bird, evidently. Let's pick a bone somewhere—we could even take in part of a show—and then adjourn to my place. Are you game?"

"Yes."

Douglas Carey stared before him rather listlessly, and

to Muir Torrington his attitude was eloquent. Therefore, pausing on his way to the door:

"Buck up, my lad!" he shouted at the top of his voice. "I should like to see you to-night for more reasons than one." He went out into the lobby, grabbing his hat, gloves, and cane. "I dined with Provost Hope yesterday."

"Did you?" Carey exclaimed, interest suddenly lighting up his vacant eyes.

"Yes," Torrington yelled, opening the door, "and there are many things which you should know." He started to go downstairs. "Things which if you were not such a proud, silent sort of idiot, you might have known already, my lad. Call for me at seven-thirty, sharp."

CHAPTER XX

DOCTOR WEISSLER

AT NO great distance from that house in Pennyfields in which a half-caste woman had recently died under extraordinary circumstances was a building which at some time had constituted the warehouse and offices of a firm of Indo-Chinese importers. From the big doors of the warehouse the title of the firm had been so carelessly effaced that one sufficiently curious might have been enabled to decipher it.

A small painted board bearing the legend "Weissler & Company" had been nailed upon these doors to indicate the change of tenancy, but the activities of Weissler & Company were not evident. The dilapidated premises, which formerly had shown some signs of commercial life, with vans loading and unloading, and the coming and going of a considerable staff, now were gloomily silent.

Shortly after the time that Muir Torrington left Bruton Street, a scene which must have been of great interest to the young physician and his friend was taking place in a room in the Limehouse premises which formerly had been the manager's office.

Seated at an extraordinarily large writing table, resembling one of those seen in board rooms, upon which were a multitude of books, documents, files of corres-

pondence, photographs, microscopes, test tubes, and other scientific paraphernalia, was a man of arresting personality.

He wore a white overall upon which were many chemical stains and burns, and, having his elbow on the table, he rested his chin in one hand—a strangely slender, white, and delicate hand for so florid a man to possess. His clean-shaven face was remarkable for its fresh, high colour, and was crowned by a perfect mane of snow-white hair. He wore spectacles with tortoise-shell rims, and above these rims craggily protruded tufted brows. From beneath them, magnified by the lenses, penetrating greenish-brown eyes looked out.

Before the table and facing the one who sat there were two men. The first, heavily built, might have been anything from a retired prize fighter to a successful greengrocer. He wore a bowler and a blue serge suit. His clean-shaven face was bronzed, his grey hair cropped close. His bearing was curiously independent. He seemed by nature to be taciturn, but he had none of the manners of a servant. A close observer who had studied his odd rolling gait might have formed the opinion that at some time he had followed the sea; and he carried his big hands, too, in a way that was characteristic.

His companion afforded a singular contrast to himself. He was equally tall, but his figure was athletic and slender. He was dressed with taste. His wavy dark hair showed slightly grey at the temples, which may have been an indication of age or of suffering. He wore a small moustache and that kind of abbreviated beard at one time known as an imperial.

There was hauteur in the way he carried himself, but his widely opened eyes possessed a strange quality; for whereas at one moment their expression would be proudly contemptuous, in the next they would grow vacant. They would be suddenly lowered as if this handsome and distinguished-looking man found himself abashed or sought to recollect something which had escaped his memory. It was a strange trio.

"I suggest, Mr. Michael," said the spectacled man seated at the table—and his use of gutturals indicated a possible German origin—"I suggest that your reason for silence is not the one you would have us believe."

Mr. Michael, who had been contemplating the floor as if in a brown study, raised his eyes and gazed contemptuously at the speaker.

"I reply," he returned, "that a—" he hesitated and vagueness crept again into his eyes—"that a man of my family does not lie, Doctor Weissler."

"Ah!" Doctor Weissler continued to regard him unmovedly. "You would have me believe that you wish to sever association with my establishment from purely altruistic motives."

"No," the other replied sharply. "If I did my whole duty I should act otherwise." He seemed to consider the point. "But I am bound to secrecy. If only I had known! You may trust me, but I must go. I can remain here no longer."

His glance grew vacant and dropped to the floor again. A swift interchange of looks took place between Doctor Weissler and the man who stood at the speaker's elbow.

"This might be arranged," Doctor Weissler con-

tinued. "Although you have neglected to consider your source of income if you leave my employment. But there is one point which must be cleared up. You were on duty last night, and it appears that No. 6 Crucible broke."

At last the speaker removed his singular gaze from the face of Michael, consulting a form which lay upon the table before him.

"In every other respect your entries seem to be accurate. But your log-book is silent respecting Crucible No. 6."

"Lucky I fell to it," growled the big man.

"I agree," said Doctor Weissler quietly. "But I do not remember having asked for your opinion, Teak."

"Well, you've got it," was the truculent reply. "I've saved the ship and I know it."

And whilst this cross-talk was carried on between Doctor Weissler and the man he addressed as Teak, whose accent identified him as hailing from the East Side, New York, the third member of the trio slipped again into some dream-world, staring vacantly about him, oblivious, it seemed, of this brewing storm, and always striving to recollect something which just eluded his memory. Doctor Weissler fixed his penetrating gaze upon Teak, and:

"You may go," he said. "I will detain you no longer."

For a moment Teak hesitated, his attitude ominous of rebellion, but finally, cowed by the gaze of those strange eyes focussed upon him through the pebbles:

"Very good," he said, went out and closed the door; whereupon:

"Now," Doctor Weissler continued, "give me your confidence, Mr. Michael. Overlook Teak's roughness. He followed you this morning because the accident which you had neglected to report filled him with suspicion. His is a suspicious nature. He is without that culture which makes doubt impossible between gentlemen. You have returned, and now I ask you, Mr. Michael, to give me some account of what took place. I have employed you in what I believe to be congenial work because I recognize a clever man even though he may not be qualified. Your salary is generous, your movements are unrestricted, and your hours of duty, if peculiar, are not long. Therefore, surely, you owe me this. Come, be frank. Crucible No. 6 was not empty; and when it burst"—a feverish note informed the guttural voice—"when it burst, what became of its contents? It is impossible"—he pressed his slender hands firmly upon the table—"that the whole of the contents should have been dissipated, rendered gaseous. You are not justified in your silence, Mr. Michael."

That the other was touched by this appeal became immediately evident. He conquered that strange retrospective mood which seemed frequently to claim him and fixed his imperious gaze upon Doctor Weissler.

"You are right," he replied. "But when I accepted your offer of employment I did not appreciate the nature of your experiments. What I have done, I have done from no personal motive. You have only to assure me that you aim not at individual gain or profit, but that a passion for science alone has inspired you, and your secret will be safe in my hands. But if this thing is to be used commercially, then I say that it

is monstrous and criminal. It will bring ruin to thousands. You have bought my silence, but I insist upon retiring from your establishment. The fact that I have been kept so much in the dark alone is suspicious. If you had worked for science, you would have allowed me to share your ideals."

The speaker, from being the defendant, had become the accuser. He seemed to tower over Doctor Weissler majestically. For a few moments there was silence in the room. Michael did not relapse into his mood of abstraction, but fearlessly met the gaze of the greenish-brown eyes. Then:

"I appreciate your sentiments, Mr. Michael," said Doctor Weissler. He swiftly touched a bell upon the table beside him. "One thing I do not appreciate in a gentleman such as yourself, I refer to your silence respecting the contents of the crucible. It was these contents which led to your sudden resolve, your sudden change of opinion respecting my motives. Oh! you have admitted it yourself. I ask you, Mr. Michael, what have you done with that which you found?"

A moment Michael hesitated, then:

"I acted in haste," he admitted, "but the result of the experiment is in safe keeping. It shall be returned to you. I recognize, however, that your principal anxiety"—he pointed to the chart on the table—"is due to the fact that I have not recorded the point at which the crucible burst." As he spoke he watched Doctor Weissler closely, but the latter made no sign. "And the degree of temperature which led to this result, you are entitled to know. You shall know—when you accept my resignation and when, therefore, I am in a

position to dictate terms. I would not profit by your discovery. But neither shall I allow you to do so. Therefore, our agreement must finish."

Doctor Weissler slightly inclined his head.

"It is agreed," he said. "If you will go down to Teak's office he will settle the necessary formalities with you. I shall join you there later."

"Very well," Michael replied, bowed stiffly, and went out.

CHAPTER XXI

KRAUSS

THE door had scarcely closed upon Michael's exit when another at the end of the large office opened and a strange figure entered unceremoniously. This was a short, squat, thick-set man, his legs bowed like those of a gorilla and his arms inhumanly long. His hair, which was profuse and apparently uncombed, as well as his bristling beard and moustache were of that intense black which is sometimes called blue-black. He had small, fierce animal eyes and his voice when he spoke was hoarse, rasping, and marked by a positively uncouth accent.

Twitching his fingers, which, as well as the backs of his hands, were covered with dark hair, he stared across the room at Doctor Weissler seated behind the big table, and:

"That man is a spy!" he said harshly, "he must not leave the place."

Doctor Weissler, who had taken up a house telephone and was about to press one of the buttons on the indicator, paused and turned his eyes in the direction of the speaker.

"Krauss," he said angrily, "you have been spying upon me again. It shall be the last time. You understand me?"

"Understand me also," the man addressed as Krauss retorted; "he shall not leave here, that impostor. You call me a spy. I say *he* is a spy, an agent sent to trap us."

Doctor Weissler took his hand from the telephone and abruptly rose from his chair. He extended one finger in a curiously compelling gesture.

"Krauss," he said, "be good enough to return to your own room. This is my office and you have entered it uninvited."

The other clenched his hairy fists, and his ape-like face was contorted with a rage almost incredible to witness.

"You are playing with fire!" he cried, his harsh voice shaking with emotion. "You play with my life, with your own life. Already the police are watching, and always there is that other."

"Also," added Doctor Weissler, his arm remaining outstretched, "there is myself, in whose room you stand and in whose presence you forget your position. Krauss, leave my office. Presently I shall talk with you, but not now."

The speaker's voice remained subdued. It possessed a curious bell note, suggesting that, had he chosen to raise it, there was reserve enough to have made it echo about the room. The appearance of Krauss must have alarmed any ordinary man. That his anger was maniacal none could have doubted; that he possessed the strength of a gorilla was manifested by his uncouth but powerful build. He now clenched his hands tightly together in an effort to obtain control of himself.

"Professor," he said, "I will be heard."

Doctor Weissler suddenly removed his tortoise-shell-rimmed spectacles and fixed upon Krauss a look which silenced him, utterly, completely.

"I have warned you. Address me but once more in that way—it does not matter that we are alone—and you know the consequences. I will talk to you later." The powerful guttural voice, now suddenly raised, boomed imperiously. "You forget yourself. Leave my room."

Something—an imprecation, an apology, none could have determined which—escaped from the lips of Krauss, and then, as if still distrustful of himself, he turned and retired hurriedly through the doorway by which he had entered. Doctor Weissler raised the house telephone, pressing a button.

"Is that you, Teak?" he asked. "Is the matter settled?" He became silent for a while, listening to Teak's reply. "Very good," he said. "Will you please come up?"

Almost immediately Teak came in, and:

"What's the next move, Doctor?" he asked.

He looked about him suspiciously as if he had expected to find someone else in the room.

"No, Teak," said Doctor Weissler. "Mr. Krauss has gone."

"Oh! I see," Teak muttered. "I suppose he has been listening again."

"He has, Teak. But it is no part of your duty to refer to it."

Doctor Weissler had not replaced his spectacles, and the gaze of his singular eyes had a perceptible effect upon the truculent Teak.

"I am sorry," the latter said, almost deferentially. "But you know what I think. I don't know that, in this case, he is not right."

"Respecting Mr. Michael?"

"Yes. I have never believed in Mr. Michael. I believe in him less than ever now."

"Has he said anything?" Doctor Weissler's eyes turned to right and left in a curiously furtive way, and:

"Not a word," Teak replied.

"What have you done?"

His glance had betrayed momentary weakness, and the watchful Teak, a human thermometer, immediately took advantage of the change of temperature.

"As arranged," he replied nonchalantly.

"Successful?" Doctor Weissler enquired.

"Quite."

"Very regrettable, and very compromising at such a time as this. We must be careful, Teak, very careful. Mr. Krauss has strange ideas. In regard to one thing, I rely upon you."

"I know, Doctor," Teak replied. "I won't let Mr. Krauss get at him."

"Is he——?" Doctor Weissler hesitated.

"No, I think he would have suffocated. He passed his word not to shout, so I took it. Did I do right?"

"Quite right, Teak. But observe every precaution. By the way, you might open the door yonder and see if the passage is clear."

Teak nodded, lurched rapidly across the room, and opened the door by which Krauss had gone out. He shrugged his shoulders and shut it again.

"No one there," he reported.

"Good," said Doctor Weissler. "By the way, Teak, I am told that two men are now on duty at the corner of Pennyfields and West India Dock Road. Formerly there was only one."

"Yes, there were two last night."

"Do you attach any significance to this?"

"It's early to say."

"And you have seen nothing and heard nothing to suggest——?" Doctor Weissler left the sentence unfinished, but Teak obviously understood his meaning, for:

"Thank goodness," he replied, a look of apprehension appearing upon his weather-beaten face. "No! I think it's a nightmare of Mr. Krauss's, but"—he made a perceptible effort to renew the armour of truculence which was his worldly habit—"for once, I am with Mr. Krauss. This gentleman assistant of yours, Doctor, knows too much. He was beating it this morning. Oh! there's no shying the fact! Now"—he bent forward—"what had he got with him? He'd got nothing on him when I picked him up. He's doubling on us! I don't care a damn for his gentility. He's a liar, and——"

Doctor Weissler stood up and raised his hand imperiously.

"Silence!" he cried. "I have warned you already, Teak. You exceed your duties grossly. Keep your place or we shall quarrel."

But now, Teak sustained the gaze of Doctor Weissler's eyes.

"It might not suit us to quarrel," he said. "I mean it might not suit either of us."

"I see."

The Doctor's voice, which had been raised, was lowered again to a soothing murmur.

"We are together in this thing," Teak began, and then stopped as if electrified.

Even the self-control of Doctor Weissler was shaken, and he clutched the edge of the table convulsively.

Coming from somewhere in the depths of the big building, muffled, dim, but horrifying, arose a sound like a stifled scream, the scream of a man in sudden agony!

It died away, and Teak stared across the room into the fixed eyes of Doctor Weissler. The latter moved rapidly around the big table.

"Teak," he said, and his guttural voice was perfectly calm, "what was that?"

"Well, it could only have been——"

"Was the door unlocked?"

"No."

"Does Mr. Krauss hold a key to it?"

"Not that I know of."

"Come with me," said Doctor Weissler.

The two went out and descended a wooden staircase to a dark, stone-paved passage in the cellars of the premises. Here they paused for a moment, listening. But except for vague rumbling of distant traffic in the streets above there was no sound to disturb the subterranean silence. Doctor Weissler advanced, Teak following. Before a heavy door, apparently that of a storeroom, they stopped. Doctor Weissler tried the door, but it was apparently locked; and, turning to Teak:

"The key," he said.

Teak selected a key from a number which he carried upon a ring, and inserted it in the lock of the door. At that:

"Go away," a voice moaned from the room within. "Oh God!—you fiend! Go away—leave me alone."

Doctor Weissler turned his eyes upon his companion.

"You heard that, Teak?"

"I did," Teak replied grimly.

"Krauss has been here. This must be stopped. I have gone far enough. I will go no farther."

CHAPTER XXII

NEW WONDER

CAREY glanced at the clock on Muir Torrington's mantelpiece, and:

"I look like winning my bet," he said laughingly.

"You do," Torrington admitted. "It is excitingly near to the hour. Where do we stand?"

He strode to the end of the room, paused, and turning, strode back again.

"Suppose my Arcadian does not turn up? Am I, or am I not, entitled to open this mysterious parcel which lies at the present moment upon my table?"

Having thus spoken he began again to pace the room.

"Well," said Carey musingly, "it's a question of ethics. If you had any reason to regard your unknown acquaintance as a criminal, you would undoubtedly be justified in examining the contents of the packet which he left in your possession."

"Ah!" cried Torrington, turning, "you're placing the onus upon me. Very well, I accept it. I do *not* think that my Arcadian was a criminal; I prefer to believe that he was an Arcadian in peril of some kind. This being so, am I not equally justified in assuming his absence to mean that the danger which he feared has

materialized? He selected me, God knows why, as a friend in need. Surely it is my duty to employ every means in my power to aid him in his necessity."

"Quite," Carey agreed—"an aspect of the matter which I had overlooked."

"Therefore," Torrington cried, "if he fails to keep his appointment—for he was a man hard pressed, Carey, I assure you—his failure can only mean that the thing he feared has come about. He counted on me, lad, and I shall not fail him. I give him half an hour. If by twelve-thirty he is not here, I propose to open this parcel. Human curiosity I do not deny, but honestly I consider this to be my duty to the unknown. How else, if he is in danger, can I hope to be of assistance to him? The only clue lies here, upon the table."

Carey helped himself to whisky and soda.

"It's more than a little complex," he confessed. "Your whole life, Torrington, forms an almost unbroken series of odd adventures. Fate seems to have singled you out as a repository of other people's troubles. To me this matter appears trivial, but you met the man face to face. I value your opinion, and therefore, if you assure me that he was really up against some vital problem, why then, yes, I agree with you. We shall serve him best by opening this parcel if he fails to appear to claim it."

"Right!" Torrington shouted, stalking down upon the speaker; "I knew you would agree with me. There go the church clocks." He paused, raising his hand. "It's midnight. I don't think he is coming, lad. Pass that tin of tobacco. We have half an hour to wait. Let's forget my dark horse of the Arcade for the time

being, and revert to the other matter which we were discussing."

Torrington raised the lid of the tin and began to fill his briar, staring at Carey the while; then:

"To be blunt," he said, "are you or are you not going down to Low Ketley?"

"I am not," Carey replied, without hesitation.

"Then you're a fool!" Torrington cried. "You are worse than a fool; you are failing in your plain duty."

"What do you mean?" Carey asked, patiently.

"I mean that now I have told you all I know of the matter, all Sir Provost explained to me, all that I have gathered elsewhere—if you are going to hold to your crazy idea that Jasmine Hope has invented all these charges against you, you are failing her, and failing her badly. Wait a minute, Carey! Can't you see that the pair of you are tied in the same web? My lad! My poor, daft laddy! Forget that you are in love and use your ordinary common sense. Has it occurred to you that she may be in danger?"

"In danger?" Carey echoed, incredulously. "What on earth do you mean? How can she be in danger, living with her aunt in peaceful Surrey?"

Muir Torrington, his pipe loaded, replaced the tin upon the table, and carefully forced its lid into place, watching his friend the while with an expression humorously compassionate. Finally:

"Carey," he said, "I hope I never fall in love. I've got the scientific mind and I take pride in knowing that when someone shows me a toadstool I don't mistake it for a mushroom. Man, man, try to see straight. If you

can't take the facts from me, go round and see Sir Provost. You have no quarrel with him."

Carey drank silently, and began to knock out his pipe into an ash tray. He was even more anxious than Torrington to put an end to the estrangement. It is characteristic of a man in Carey's frame of mind that whilst, unaided, he can find no means of spanning the ever-widening chasm, any plank, however creaky, offered by a tactful friend, assumes the aspect of a serviceable bridge.

"I know you want to help," he said. "It's decent of you, and I appreciate it. But if you had been called a liar to your face?—— Oh! damn it!" he groaned. "I don't think you know what it feels like—how one's pride suffers. You see, I had done nothing to deserve it."

"But what you *don't* see," Torrington shouted, "is that Jasmine had been compelled by apparently undeniable facts to believe that you *were* a liar! Damn it all, my lad, you still believe that *she* is one! Why, you told me again only to-night that she must have known of your telephone messages to the house." He raised his voice yet higher. "You are becoming a feminist!" he yelled. "Hell! You argue like a flapper and reason like an ostrich! What we have been taught to regard as natural laws are being turned upside down here in London—and you tootle about your 'pride'!"

"I suppose you are right," Carey admitted, "in fact, it would appear that many people are suffering at present from a similar form of hallucination."

Muir Torrington began to stride up and down the room again, and:

"You mean the grey face?" he suggested, jerking his head aside and glancing back at Carey over his shoulder.

"What else?" said Carey. "It's a relief, of course, to know that I am not the only victim, but——"

"Ah!" Torrington whirled around. "That is a very big 'but,' my lad. We don't view this thing from quite the same angle, but just consider—consider."

He paused in front of his friend, raising the outstretched fingers of his left hand and ticking off points upon them.

"First case: *you* dream of the grey face, and the dream corresponds with an unaccountable loss of consciousness and an even more serious personal loss—that of your report. Second: a half-caste woman, a woman, so far as we are aware, of no importance whatever in the scheme of things, dreams of the grey face (for this cannot have been a coincidence, Carey), and her dream corresponds with her death. Third"— he took a step nearer, his third finger rigidly upheld, his thumb pressed upon it—"giving an account of these matters to Sir John Nevinson, your reference to the phenomenon of the grey face suddenly awoke a memory lying dormant, and what did you learn? That he, too, had suffered this dream! Now, then, it's time your brains woke up. They have been in bed long enough. Carry on."

"Between the half-caste woman and myself or Sir John Nevinson," said Carey dully, "there is no possible link, or there would seem to be none. Between myself and Sir John the case is different; we are linked by a common interest in this super-criminal who steals

Foreign Office despatches but does not overlook diamonds."

Torrington nodded vigorously, turned, and set off walking again.

"The figure of Buddha appears to have been the cause of my own lapse," Carey continued; "therefore the figure of Buddha was the link between me and the enemy. It is evident. Since it was swallowed up in a bank strongroom I have experienced no recurrence of the trouble. Therefore the figure was a link between me and—whom?"

Torrington shot out a pointing finger.

"My dear lad," he shouted, "it's as plain as a flagstaff on a hilltop: Madame Sabinov!"

"I agree," Carey replied, continuing to speak in the same dull voice. "She is a dangerous woman. I believe she possesses some kind of hypnotic power."

"Ah!" Torrington cried triumphantly, "now we are in sight of land! *Why* do you believe that she possesses some kind of hypnotic power?"

Carey laughed in a rather embarrassed fashion.

"Because I recently called upon her," he replied, "or, rather, I saw her home from Trepniak's place, and——" he paused. "Well, it's amazing, Torrington, and thinking of it in cold blood, I know that the explanation is not so obvious as some might suppose. Briefly, I lost my head. I have been waiting for an opportunity to tell you. It happened on Sunday; and on Sunday I had another experience, too, which was phenomenal."

"Where?" Torrington asked. "At Madame's?"

"No; at Trepniak's house."

"Then you succeeded in getting in?" Torrington cried eagerly. "Did you find it correspond to my description?"

"Very closely," Carey replied. "Of course, it's the house of a madman, of a very dangerous madman."

"Very dangerous," Torrington agreed. "Has it occurred to you, Carey, to advise the authorities to look up this alien's record?"

Carey started, and:

"No, for some reason it had not occurred to me," he confessed.

"To me," said Torrington, "it occurred at once. But I am rapidly coming to the conclusion, lad, that I was born to be a detective, and not a physician. My income would be even less, if possible, but then, so would my expenses. Now you"—he pointed again in his vigorous fashion—"whilst admittedly excellent with a midnight lamp and an efficient service of wet towels, are less successful as the Man on the Spot. I admit it isn't your job; it isn't mine, and my attempts so far, as I have mentioned, have been slightly under par. Nevertheless, I have a growing confidence in myself."

He suddenly burst out laughing and began to rap his pipe upon the heel of his shoe, regardless of the welfare of the carpet.

"And now," he added, "tell me what took place at Trepniak's and at Madame Sabinov's. But wait—wait!"

He stood, empty pipe in hand, staring at the clock upon the mantelpiece.

"Yes," Carey nodded. "The time is up! What shall we do?"

"I reply without a moment's hesitation," said Torrington. "Open the parcel! Here are mysteries enough, some of them dangerous. You and I would be twin fools to allow ourselves to become involved in another, blindfolded."

At that he swooped down upon the little packet, untied the string with which it was fastened, and revealed a cardboard box which at some time had contained twenty cigarettes of a popular brand. He was about to lift the lid when he paused again, listening.

"You see," he said, "we are punctilious."

A neighbouring church clock was chiming the half-hour after midnight.

"Now!" Torrington cried, and threw back the lid.

Within, wrapped in tissue paper, was something hard, having the feel of half a small walnut shell. In a moment Torrington had unwrapped the paper; whereupon:

"Good God!" Carey cried.

Torrington's surprise was equally great, or even greater, so that he dropped the glittering object from his fingers; and, throwing out many-hued sparks in the lamplight, it rolled a little way across the carpet—the largest diamond which either of these two had ever set eyes upon!

CHAPTER XXIII

IN TREPNIAK'S LIBRARY

MADAME SABINOV idly inspected the books in the library. It was the only sane room in Trepniak's house, or appeared so until one's researches went farther. On inspection, its appointments, without being laboured productions in the grotesque, all proved to be distressingly original; but the open bookcases afforded a restful note and the beautiful bindings of the many volumes led one to expect them to contain classics of permanent interest to the human race. She had never troubled even to open one of the volumes before, but now, idly, she took down several, and immediately recognized that the seeming sanity of the room was illusory. Trepniak's obsession was observable here as elsewhere, with a curious difference; or, rather, the way in which it operated was not so obvious as usual.

The handsome books on examination proved to be bound in unfamiliar materials. Some were beautiful, some were bizarre. There were books bound in painted ivory, in crocodile skin, in rare woods, in zebra hide, in Chinese tapestry, in materials incredible when so employed; and the works contained in these invariably costly wrappings afforded the high note of astonishment. Here was the cheapest kind of novel, here were romances of the sort which issue still-born from the

press, or which live their little hour of life and are forgotten: works by unknown and unknowing authors; essays produced at the writers' expense; poems privately printed. All were modern and all must automatically have found their way to the wastepaper basket of any self-respecting editor or publisher.

She was in the act of replacing a vacuous novel, bearing the imprint of one of those firms whose sole source of income is the enthusiasm of incompetent amateurs, when Trepniak came in.

Madame turned, and they faced one another across the length of the room.

"Your visit is delightful but unexpected," he said.

Madame Sabinov dropped back into the chair from which she had arisen to pursue her enquiries. She wore a long cape, not unlike a cavalry cloak, carried out in black and gold but having an upstanding collar resembling an Elizabethan ruff. Her black hat, which, as was her habit, completely concealed her hair, boasted a golden feather and resembled one of those hats which appear in some of the pictures of Charles IX of France. Gauntlet gloves lay upon the floor beside her.

She turned her slumbrous eyes once more in the direction of the speaker, as Trepniak pulled a chair forward and sat down near her.

"You did not expect me!" she suggested.

"Frankly, no," he replied. "But you are welcome, nevertheless."

"In short," Madame continued languidly, "although you did not expect me, you are not surprised to find me here. Oh! I beg of you—don't apologize. But I am not used to neglect."

"Neglect?" Trepniak exclaimed. "You think I have neglected you?"

Madame Sabinov made an idle gesture with her hand, as if to dismiss this topic, and:

"What does it matter?" she continued. "Friendship such as ours always ends the same; one or the other tires. You have tired—and, perhaps a little bit, so have I. No, please let me go on."

Trepniak had stood up, physical energy evidenced in every movement of his strong body. He was almost a forbidding figure as he looked down at her.

Lowering her eyes, she turned her head aside slowly, and gazed across the room as if unconscious of his imperious regard. Her disdain wounded him. He clenched his hands, which were so curiously slender, and his teeth glittered as his lips were drawn slightly back from them. The pale face, set upon the powerful column of his neck and surmounted by tight auburn curls, might have been that of Nero suffering a sartorial criticism from Petronius.

"In Paris," Madame Sabinov resumed, "we were mutually attracted. Vulgarity I despise, but you had raised vulgarity to an art, and I worship Art. You imagined, perhaps, that it was your wealth which won me. It was not. Any courtesan who has not totally lost her attractions can find a wealthy friend, if grossness, ill-breeding, do not offend her."

Trepniak interrupted.

"This is ancient history," he said angrily; "it is a point upon which we shall never see eye to eye. Why labour it? Do you reproach me? In what have I failed? I have provided for you so well that you are

assured, not merely of comfort, but of luxury, whilst you live. Do you reproach me?"

He drew his chair forward, endeavouring to detain the glance of Madame Sabinov.

"Believe that I have always been sincere," he continued, "although I have never spoken to you of marriage, Poppæa."

Now, that which he sought was accomplished.

The eyes of Madame Sabinov were turned in his direction, and the curious, slumbrous gaze met his own.

"You know so little of me," he went on, "and I so little of you. You have always regarded me as a *poseur* who sought to dazzle with his greater wealth, his higher accomplishments. Very well: I shall abase myself. If marriage had been the price of your friendship, I would have bought you at that price, gladly. I hesitated to offer it, only because I thought that in your eyes it counted for nothing."

There was silence for a while. Madame Sabinov's gaze became slightly diverted.

Across the speaker's shoulder she was regarding a velvet curtain draped between two bookcases and, possibly, concealing a door. This curtain had moved very slightly, not as if stirred by a draught of air, but rather as though someone who had been standing very close to it upon the other side had moved away, noiselessly and secretly.

Now the movement ceased, leaving her doubtful whether to ascribe it to an unduly active imagination, stimulated by a vague fear which she always experienced in this house, or to the presence of someone who had been listening to her conversation with Trepniak. Then:

"You insult me!" she said sharply, again meeting the gaze of those greenish-brown eyes which could inspire terror; "I know you for a man of intellect, and so I know that you jest. Marriage! How dare you offer me marriage! You did well to hesitate, Anton. You may speak of it now without fear, but had you spoken of it then"—she shrugged her shoulders and smiled contemptuously—"we should never have become friends. I am Madame Sabinov, a widow, and as Madame Sabinov, the lonely, I do as I choose. It is my right. To whom do my actions give sorrow? To no one. I offend against no creed in which I believe. I keep my pride in the company of any woman, because I keep my convictions. But before I could give them up, before I could sign them away, be no longer Poppæa Sabinov, I should have to love, not only with my mind and my body, but also with my soul."

Trepniak's expression, his pose, were danger signals, but, composing himself:

"What has inspired this particular outburst?" he enquired, speaking very softly: "the discovery of your—soul?"

"Perhaps," she replied. "Who knows? But if the mountain will not come to Mohammed, Mohammed must go to the mountain. Your fancies amused me because they differed from those of any man I had ever known. The house which you generously allowed me to use (your generosity I shall always remember) is wonderful. So are the servants whom you installed there. But the schemes of decoration, based upon descriptions in Arab legends; upon memoirs of Versailles; upon dreams of what Atlantis might have

been like; upon a thousand and one fancies—weary me. I am tired of receiving you, dressed as Cleopatra, in an Egyptian temple; as a Greek slave in a room of marble; as Madame de Pompadour in a cabinet having neither doors nor windows but served by a supper table which sinks through the floor; as Boadicea, in an ancient British bower; as Thais; as Semiramis in a sea of roses costing as much as would keep a poor man for a year. It amused me for a while; your sensuous imagination was inspiring. But now it wearies me."

She opened a bag looped over the arm of her chair, taking out a number of legal-looking documents.

"These are the leases and deeds," she said, "and the other dreadful formalities of the law which entitle me to live in the house to the end of my days, or indeed, to live luxuriously anywhere. Please allow me to return them. No, it is not a mood; it is not pique; it is something which I have thought out. I really mean it."

Trepniak spoke hoarsely.

"Some rumour has reached you?"

Madame Sabinov shook her head.

"Please understand," she said, almost wearily, "that this decision has nothing whatever to do with any action of yours. It is due——"

"Yes," Trepniak interrupted: "to whom is it due?"

"It is due," Madame Sabinov replied, "to the living influence of someone who is dead."

Her words, which must have seemed mere poetic imagery to many, produced an extraordinary effect upon the man to whom they were addressed.

Trepniak's eyes opened widely, and then closed as though a spasm of pain had pierced his body; his

fingers twitched; he stepped back from Madame Sabinov as from a menace. He groaned and, raising his hands to his face in a gesture of despair, turned and walked to the end of the library. There, facing her, he lowered his hands, and:

"Do you mean," he asked, "can you mean, that you have no wish to see me again?"

"I mean nothing of the kind," Madame Sabinov declared, standing up and collecting gloves and handbag and placing the documents upon a little table. "I have gone to the Ritz. I shall be pleased to see you at any time." She walked toward the door. "This interview has been very difficult," she said. "I think it would be wise if we ended it. Come and see me to-morrow. Perhaps I shall be able to make you understand."

She went out, closing the door behind her; but Trepniak did not stir. He was as a man so battered by warring emotions as to be incapable of decision. Then, as he stood there, fists clenched, his expression, his pose, tortured—something—a faint sound, an instinct—restored in a moment the masterful man who had astonished latter-day London. He fixed an imperious gaze upon the velvet curtain draped between the two bookcases, and:

"Krauss!" he called.

His powerful voice, fully raised, boomed around the room. None replied, and Trepniak walked in the direction of the curtain, and again:

"Krauss!" he cried; but there was silence.

Trepniak, grasping the curtain, drew it aside, revealing a door which it had concealed. He grasped the handle and turned it. The door was locked.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE WIZARD'S WINDOW

THROUGH room after room Trepniak passed, looking about him from right to left; through apartments orange and blue, purple and aquamarine. Some seemed to have been inspired by Babylonian memories; others resembled a film producer's conception of Sodom or Gomorrah. Few people had been privileged to make such a tour of the house; fewer still, so privileged, could have failed to be touched with vague horror.

The ridiculous, transcended, becomes the grotesque, and since genius is sometimes grotesque, one viewing this succession of unique abnormalities must have recognized himself to be in the house of a grotesque genius. The Golden House of Nero must have struck such a note. The mad, when endowed with millions, may so express their madness as to make the beholder share in it; as to create something tangible which proclaims: "This is madness," so that any one brought in contact with it becomes conscious of the taint.

Such was the peculiar property of Trepniak's house.

He met no servant upon his tour. He might have been the only living creature in all that nightmare abode. Room after room—each wild as a hashish

dream—he entered and left, encountering no one. Some of the rooms were locked, some were windowless; but lighting no lamps, he passed from point to point, locking and unlocking doors and examining midnight interiors with the assurance of familiarity.

At last before a heavy door he paused, keys in hand. He was listening. But no sound came from the room beyond and he passed on. Whatever or whomsoever he had sought, he had failed to find, and, presently returning to the main staircase, he stood for a moment looking down into the hallway.

It was empty; the big building was silent. Sounds of traffic in Park Lane were clearly audible, but within the house nothing stirred, no voice spoke. Trepniak mounted the stairs, passed along a narrow corridor, and in a sort of little lobby or anteroom stopped, stood still, and listened. Then he crossed to a door, tried the handle unavailingly, and rapped.

"Krauss!" he called.

There was no reply, and once again, banging with his fists, "KRAUSS!" he repeated, a high note of anger in his voice.

No one answered him. His sense of hearing was acute, but, standing there in the lobby, he could detect not the slightest sound from the rooms beyond, so that finally he turned and descended again to the library. Crossing to the high, gleaming mantel—an example of some kind of lacquer work—he pressed a bell beside it, and then, hands clasped behind him, stood upon the rug before the hearth—waiting.

Almost immediately a heavily built man wearing a blue serge suit came in.

"You wanted me?" he asked, and his manner, whilst in a sense respectful, was scarcely that of a servant.

"I did, Teak," Trepniak replied. "Has Mr. Krauss gone out?"

Teak stared uncomprehendingly.

"I should hardly think so," he replied. "It isn't usual."

"It is most unusual, Teak; but he does not appear to be in his rooms."

"Really!" Teak exclaimed. "You don't think——"

"No." Trepniak spoke with assurance. "I am certain that he would not dare to return to Limehouse now. Nevertheless, I am deeply concerned. I learn that two men are on duty at the corner of Mount Street, whereas formerly there was only one."

"Yes," Teak nodded. "There were two last night."

"Ah!" Trepniak murmured. "And you have seen nothing and heard nothing to suggest that——"

He left the sentence unfinished, but:

"No," Teak replied. "It's something I don't pretend to understand, but it's got me jumping—even worse than Mr. Krauss."

Trepniak interrupted.

"Speaking of Mr. Krauss," he said, "presently I shall ask you to endeavour to find him." He paused, glancing toward the curtained space between the bookcases. "Are you aware that he has duplicates of my private keys?"

"What!" Teak stared harder than ever. "Since when?"

"I cannot say, Teak, but he was here to-night, listening to my conversation."

"With?"

"A lady who called upon me."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure."

Teak smiled in his quick, grim fashion.

"He's asking for trouble," he said.

"All trouble must be avoided."

"Right enough. But I take it you're not going to stand for being spied upon?"

"I am not, Teak, and I wish to tell him so."

"Of course"—Teak squared his shoulders and set his feet widely apart as if he stood upon the bridge of a rolling ship—"I can understand that he is anxious. A word now, in a certain quarter, and—well—if I may say so, we should all be in the same cart."

"Yes." Trepniak fixed his gaze upon the speaker. "Possibly, Teak, you will endeavour to find Mr. Krauss."

The imperative note had returned to his voice, and Teak, who had something of the bully in his composition, bowed to the greater personality.

"Very good," he replied, turned, and went out.

Assured of his departure, Trepniak crossed to that panel in the wall of which Muir Torrington had spoken, inserted a key in the lock, and entered the room beyond. Closing the door, he seated himself at the glass-covered table which had been the scene of the vivisection of the lizard.

A number of papers were littered upon it, bearing columns of figures and rough diagrams. Trepniak switched on a table lamp and began closely to study these manuscripts. After a time he lay back in his

chair, reflecting. The room was absolutely silent, so that it might have been situate not in the midst of a busy city, but in the heart of a desert.

Free from observation, he became a different man. His eyes lost something of their hypnotic quality and became very tired-looking, as if weariness constantly urged them to close. A certain *flair*, a genius for showmanship which distinguished Trepniak, the Trepniak who had dazzled the world of London, was missing in these moments of retirement. He was reflecting deeply, concentrating upon some intimate problem, and at last, standing up, he walked around the table and opened that heavy door which had afforded Muir Torrington a unique experience.

He mounted the staircase to the little tower room above, switched on one of the lights, and stood looking about him.

The incredible laboratory presented its usual aspect. Trepniak seated himself in a revolving chair, the only chair in the room, and turned it about, looking up at the great globe, spinning ceaselessly, miraculously, upon its mystic axis. Save for the humming of this glittering phenomenon the place was silent.

Trepniak pressed a switch and there was darkness. Vaguely, as if illuminated from within, the outline of the ever-moving beryl might be discerned. The strange blue light increased in power until, framed in the darkness of the laboratory, the globe resembled a patch of tropical sky.

There was a faint movement, suggesting that someone might have entered, or have left the room, and then silence except for the ceaseless humming sound.

And now, magically, like miniature fragments projected by some exquisite cinematograph, figures and groups, landscapes, interiors, appeared shadowily, grew seemingly concrete, animated with life, and faded again, one after another, within that globe of mystery. Following a succession of such scenes, which rose and almost instantly faded again, came one of a well but sparsely appointed bed-chamber, such as may be found in any of the principal London hotels. Madame Sabinov, wearing a loose robe, was seated before the dressing table brushing her hair.

The picture grew sharper and sharper, the effect being similar to that seen in the focussing screen of a camera. In fact, it was almost more vivid than reality; and at this moment the circular blue frame surrounding it, created by that strange light in the crystal, disappeared, leaving, as if suspended in mid-air, a minute apartment, the tiny, doll-like, but living figure seated in a chair before the mirror.

A voice spoke, a voice low but vibrant.

"I am here. Obey me."

The miniature Madame Sabinov laid her brush listlessly upon the table, stared for a while into the mirror, and then turned her chair around, as a picture actress might have done when directed to face the camera. Her expression was perfectly vacant—the expression of a sleep-walker. Her robe slipped unheeded from her shoulders, and she lay back in the chair looking like a beautiful model posing for some classical picture.

The voice spoke again:

"Find paper, pen, and ink."

Madame Sabinov rose, clutching her falling draperies, and crossed the room to a side table. From a little rack she took a sheet of paper and picked up a fountain pen which lay there.

"Write," the voice continued, "the name of the consultant you have recently visited."

Madame Sabinov, dropping upon one knee, wrote.

"Blot what you have written, enclose it in an envelope, and address the envelope to Benjamin Teak, Weissler & Company, Narrow Street, Limehouse, E. 14."

Madame Sabinov obeyed.

"Now," the voice directed, "pull your wrap about your shoulders and ring the bell."

The tiny figure responded to the command, ringing a bell beside the door.

"To the waiter or chambermaid who will come," the inexorable voice went on, "give the order that the letter is to be stamped by the hall porter and posted immediately."

A chambermaid came in, took her instructions, and went out with the letter.

"Return to the dressing table," the voice commanded. Madame Sabinov did so. "Take up your brush. Forget—forget—and awake."

The blue halo began to grow around the tiny picture; it grew more vivid, and, with its coming, the scene faded, until it was gone completely, and the globe showed again as a disk of tropical sky.

Almost immediately a second picture began to form. It was that of a cellar in which were a camp bed, a chair, and a plain table. Upon the table appeared the re-

mains of a substantial meal, and upon the bed a man was seated, his elbows resting upon his knees, his head lowered into his hands.

The picture became focussed sharply; whereupon, as before, the blue revolving globe in which it was framed disappeared. The man dropped his hands and raised his head, revealing the haggard features of Mr. Michael. He looked up and from side to side, as one who urgently taxes his memory. He rose, took three strides—and paused, looking about him.

He nodded his handsome head, as who should say, "Of course, I had forgotten. I am imprisoned." He returned and dropped again wearily upon the bed.

"I am here," came the commanding voice. "Obey me."

There was no perceptible response. Michael threw himself upon the bed, casting his arms abroad, as a man in despair who only asks for sleep.

"I am here," the vibrant voice repeated. "Obey me."

Michael, uninfluenced, turned over, lying prone, his head pillowed upon his arm.

In the laboratory something stirred—whereupon, instantly, magically, the picture vanished; only the glittering crystal was visible. But in the next instant came the faint click of an electric switch depressed. A high voice spoke—a frenzied voice:

"Who's there? Who are you? My God! Who are you?"

CHAPTER XXV

OFFICIAL MEASURES

I GATHER, then"—Sir John Nevinson stared through his monocle at Inspector Whiteleaf—"that there is no evidence of foul play?"

"Absolutely none," the Inspector replied. "She was the wife of a man named Len Yung—a Chinese deck-hand. His ship is due at Singapore to-morrow, but I don't suppose he will be able to throw any light upon the matter. She was half-caste, a Welsh mother and a Chinese father. Perfectly respectable, so far as I can gather, and with no family. As you will see, sir, it is suggested that her death may have been caused by some intense shock. The condition of the brain, I believe, is abnormal. But, of course, this takes me rather out of my depth."

"Of course," Sir John murmured, turning aside, closing his left eye, and glancing down at a typewritten report on blue paper which lay upon his table. "There seems to be very little point in endeavouring to trace the man who last saw her alive."

Inspector Whiteleaf coughed discreetly, and:

"Respecting that, sir," he said, "I am just a little mystified. Of course, I realize that this case is unusual, or you would not be dealing with it personally, but it is really very difficult, sir, to act upon advice of this kind."

He pulled out a notebook, opened it, and read:

"'*A.* traced a man from a certain house in Mayfair. The man's description is as follows':—Then I have a description which sounds like that of an ape. '*A.* has reason to believe that this man was with the woman at the time immediately preceding her death. *A.* entered the house just before the woman died, and without fully recovering consciousness she whispered the words *Grey Face.*'"

Inspector Whiteleaf closed the book and returned it to his pocket. Sir John Nevinson had listened patiently, regarding the speaker in his own peculiarly fierce fashion.

"Now, sir," the Inspector continued, "it is scarcely reasonable to ask me to trace this man. 'A certain house in Mayfair' wants a bit of finding. But the woman's last words are highly important."

"Indeed!" said Sir John, sitting very upright. "In what way, Inspector?"

"In this way, sir. 'Grey face,' whatever 'Grey face' may be, is a kind of popular nightmare in the Limehouse district. Oh, I can't say much, sir, but I've got men at work. All I have been able to gather so far is that 'Grey face' is a sort of bogey in those parts. You might say that Limehouse is haunted by 'Grey face.' I have picked it up in several quarters."

"You interest me," the Commissioner declared. "But I don't quite follow you. *What* have you picked up?"

Inspector Whiteleaf smiled in a slightly embarrassed way; then:

"Just this, sir," he replied. "You have been out

East, and so have I. Well, you know how a sudden superstition will creep through a whole native quarter. All you can gather about it is just a word or a couple of words, but to mention it is enough to make any native tremble. It's unaccountable—I've seen it myself, in India. Well, something of the sort has happened in Limehouse. 'Grey face' is a big scare down there just now. For what it stands, I haven't been able to find out; but I will later, if it's humanly possible."

"I am sure you will, Inspector," said the Commissioner. "I have every confidence in your zeal. Indeed"—he adjusted his monocle—"the purpose of this present interview is to entrust to you the practical conduct of a tremendously difficult case. It has hitherto been dealt with by two distinct departments. It is so complex, and so extensive, that it seems to concern the Special Branch as much as your own. However, I believe in centralized control. It has always been my policy. I had marked you, myself, as an efficient officer, and my opinion has recently been confirmed by an independent observer."

Detective Inspector Whiteleaf tingled to his very finger tips. He was being permitted a glimpse of the usually inscrutable mind of the great Chief. He recognized the influence of Douglas Carey, that mysterious Unknown, and was duly grateful. Also, knowing Sir John, he recognized that complete ruin or rapid promotion to the rank of Superintendent lay in his immediate future.

He was about to be given "special powers"—and the history of officers so selected was not a wholly glorious

one. It meant that, in regard to this particular case, men senior to himself would be superseded; it meant jealousy, and, if not absolute opposition, at best half-hearted coöperation. He was about to be put upon his mettle.

"You will find in this envelope," the Commissioner continued, "reports of various officers upon matters seemingly having no connection one with another. For instance, you will find details of the recent Hatton Garden diamond robbery. You will find particulars relating to the loss of a despatch by the Hon. Ewart Stephens, together with some facts relating to a political theft from the house of Lord Brankforth. Finally, the envelope contains a report by Mr. Douglas Carey, which I desire you to read most carefully. He, as well as the officers of various departments concerned, will be entirely at your service from now onward. I have given instructions to this effect, and you are relieved of your ordinary duties."

"Thank you, sir," said Inspector Whiteleaf. "I am very grateful to you. I shall do my best. And now, sir"—he cleared his throat—"do you wish to hear my report regarding the man Trepniak, or does that inquiry belong to the duties of which I have been relieved?"

Sir John shook his head emphatically.

"No," he replied, "according to Mr. Carey, it is part of the case." He tapped his finger upon the envelope of which he had spoken. "There is a note here on the subject; Mr. Carey will tell you more personally. Now what have you learned respecting this man's history?"

Inspector Whiteleaf once more took out his notebook, consulted it, and:

"Very little, I am afraid," he confessed. "His full name appears to be Anton de Trepniak. It sounds assumed to me, but I may be wrong. He is immensely wealthy and he describes himself as a Russian subject."

"One moment, Inspector," the Commissioner interrupted. "You have not approached this man personally, nor any member of his household?"

"Certainly not, sir. I had no instructions to do so. The information I have here has been obtained through the usual channels."

"Very good." Sir John lay back in his chair. "Carry on."

"Well," Whiteleaf continued, "I have traced his bank, or one of them, and enormous sums of money pass through his account."

"By whom are these sums paid in?" murmured the Commissioner.

"By a Paris bank."

"Then France is the source of his wealth?"

"Not at all," said the Inspector. "I have gone one step farther. Money is paid into his Paris account from Moscow. That baffled me, of course; we are out of touch with Moscow, as you know, sir. But it's a bit significant."

"Very significant," the Commissioner agreed. "In fact, it is highly important." He spoke almost excitedly. "This man is in London for some international purpose. I may as well tell you, now, that it was from the house of M. de Trepniak in Park Lane that the person whose description suggests an ape was traced to Limehouse. Mr. Carey is prepared to see you. Doubtless he will divulge the identity of the person described

as *A.* in the note which you have. Next, Inspector, regarding Madame Sabinov: Your time has been very fully occupied; possibly you have had no leisure to devote to her?"

"Not very much, sir," the Inspector admitted; "but I have learned one or two things from the assistant I put on the job. I have had no opportunity of tracing her history, but she has left her house, of which the address was given me, and is now staying at an hotel. Shortly after her departure, I understand, a perfect army of workmen took possession and the house has been entirely dismantled."

"Really!" the Commissioner murmured. "Of course, you have had no time to learn in whose name it was leased?"

"Not yet, sir; but I expect a report on the subject later to-day."

"Good," said Sir John. "Make all your reports directly to me. You may see me at any time."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE EMPRESS

"YES, I will try to forgive you!" said Jasmine. But her face was radiant, and she smiled at the telephone in a manner which must have moved any instrument less chilly. She listened awhile to the voice at the other end of the wires, and:

"Of course I understand," she declared. "But you see *I* was in the same boat. The things I told you sounded like deliberate lies, but so did the things you told *me!*"

"Jasmine!" Carey spoke eagerly. "There is more in this than a mere misunderstanding. You realize *that?*"

"I do," Jasmine replied.

"We have both been played upon," Carey continued, "by someone possessing strange mental powers. I have lots of things to tell you. I cannot possibly be down in time for dinner. If I arrive a little later, will it matter?"

"Not at all," said Jasmine, "but come as soon as you can."

"I have seen your father," Carey continued, "and he realizes, as I do, that we all have a hidden enemy."

Awhile longer they talked; and when at last Jasmine hung up the receiver she literally danced to her room. Theories touching the destruction of masculine control and the triumph of feminism had been brushed aside at the sound of a man's voice as thistledown is swept by the breeze.

She was radiantly happy. No longer did she regard the county of Surrey as a spot forgotten by the gods. Twilight was painting shadows in the quaint nooks and rambling corridors of Low Ketley, and twilight Jasmine always associated with melancholy. Not so this evening. She loved the growing dusk because her own heart was alight.

Low Ketley was a romantic old house full of mysteries, but all of them of a delightful kind. She was sure that she could live here for ever. She crossed to her open window and looked out toward the tree-topped mound.

Beyond, where the circling hills raised their mysterious zigzag paths and secret woods up to the shadowy sky, lay the London road. She saw it as a ribbon, and to a woman a ribbon is an intimate thing. It was a link between two lives: how wonderful; indeed, all the world was wonderful to-night.

Jasmine sat down to consider which dress she should wear. Almost automatically she opened the dainty Japanese box in which she kept cigarettes, for, when reflecting, Jasmine always smoked. In the act of doing so, and as her glance lighted on the trinkets which lay there, an uncanny memory came to her.

Why it should have come at this particular moment she could not imagine, for she handled the box a dozen times or more every day. It was an illusive memory, associated with something evil—the memory of a grey face, a dead face, except that the eyes glowed like buried jewels.

It chilled her physically, and she suppressed a shudder. She concluded that it was something which she

had dreamed and, for a time, forgotten. Taking up a cigarette, she groped for a match; then, suddenly, feverishly, her brain reeled, she grew icily cold—and as a flying panorama she saw the events of the evening from the time that Douglas had telephoned. She heard his voice; remembered running back joyously to her room to select a frock. She remembered opening her cigarette box—then these memories faded, as dream figures fade in the moment of awakening.

This vision of a quiet country life was lost, submerged by a deafening blare of trumpets—triumphant, terrific. It ceased, and Jasmine looked about her.

She was in a wonderful room of cream and gold—a boudoir such as Marie Antoinette might have possessed. She was seated in a low, cushioned chair before an oval mirror. A maid was deftly arranging her hair, dressed in an elaborate and extraordinary style, in order to support the crown which she wore and which was ablaze with precious stones.

Her shoulders were bare. A rope of pearls clung softly about her neck; her dazzling robes resembled the plumage of an Oriental peacock; and she stared in wonderment which gradually gave place to a sense of familiarity at her jewel-laden fingers; for Jasmine rarely wore rings, and never more than one at a time.

But, of course!—she closed her eyes momentarily. She was thinking again of her dream, in which she had been a simple girl. When had she dreamed that dream? She, whose life was an endless pageant! Her duty lay before her; this was no time for dreams.

Her women curtsied ceremoniously and Jasmine stood up as a man entered.

He wore a scarlet uniform and an ermine cloak which trailed upon the floor behind him. His head, crowned with tight red curls, was the head of a conqueror. Power and majesty were displayed in every movement, and:

"You are ready?" he asked, and bending, kissed her hand.

"I am ready," she replied.

He nodded to the women, and they left the apartment.

"This is the hour of your triumph and of mine," he continued. "When you step out on to the platform you step into view of a hundred million subjects in the four quarters of the earth. In China, in Russia, your people wait, their faces turned to the West; India, Persia, Arabia are yours, and Africa kneels, watching the North. Mighty human forces are beating upon us. In America at last"—a note of triumph entered his voice—"they bow the knee; and from Boston to the Pacific slopes, from Texas to the Manitoba border, you are acknowledged and awaited. All will see you, and, when you speak, all will hear you. No woman since humanity was born has known such a moment. Millions upon whom your eyes can never rest, whom you can never know, to-day will see you, will hear your voice; and you and I shall listen to all the peoples of the earth hailing the first Emperor and Empress of the World. Are you ready?"

"I am ready," Jasmine repeated.

He took her hand and led her toward double doors at the end of the room. Slowly the leaves of cream and gold began to open—when there came a deafening

crash of thunder. It struck like a physical blow upon Jasmine's brain. She staggered, threw out her arms, and fell . . .

A frenzied shriek arose, piercing, horrifying, and audible in the most remote rooms of Low Ketley. It was even heard by a belated workman in the orchard.

Aunt Phil, who was dressing in a room only across the landing from that occupied by Jasmine, was the first to reach the girl, although two servants burst in almost immediately behind her.

Jasmine was lying prone upon the floor, her outstretched hands opening and closing convulsively.

"Douglas—Douglas!" she moaned—"save me! The grey face—the grey face!"

"My dear!"

Aunt Phil knelt down beside her and tried to raise the trembling girl.

Jasmine turned her head. She was white to the lips but recognition was dawning in her eyes, then:

"I want Douglas," she moaned.

She struggled to her knees, reached out gropingly, and at last threw her arms around the elder woman's neck. She began to sob convulsively.

"Hold me tight," she said; "don't let me go. It has been here again—it is always here."

"*What* is always here, my dear?" Aunt Phil asked soothingly, whilst the frightened servants looked on in stupefaction.

"Someone," Jasmine whispered—"something. Something that comes for me—that takes me away—I don't know where to. Don't let me go again. Where is Douglas? I want Douglas."

CHAPTER XXVII

HERMON EL BÂHARI

SIR PROVOST HOPE, his solitary dinner concluded, lighted a cigar and rang a bell which meant coffee in the library. He walked across the lobby and seated himself in the cosy, book-lined room.

Upon the table at his elbow were a number of newly arrived scientific journals and an unopened parcel of books from America. Sir Provost settled himself in the well-worn leather armchair as Ford entered with coffee.

"Shall I pour out the curaçao, sir?" Ford enquired.

"No," Sir Provost replied. "I can help myself if I feel like it. What have you there, Ford?"

Ford handed him a card, and:

"The gentleman has just arrived, sir," he explained. "I informed him that you would see no one, but he smiled in a way that told me he must be a friend of yours."

Sir Provost held the card nearer to the lamp upon the table beside him and read, "Hermon el Bâhari." A wrinkle of perplexity showed between his brows.

"But I don't know Mr. el Bâhari," he replied. "At least, his name is unfamiliar to me. What does he look like?"

"I'm sorry," said Ford, for he prided himself upon his instinct for unwelcome visitors. "He's an Eastern

gentleman, sir—I mean, he wears evening dress but he's brown, with a red cap on his head."

"You mean a fez?" Sir Provost suggested.

Ford nodded.

"That's it, sir."

Sir Provost continued to look puzzled, until:

"Oh! I am sorry!" Ford added, and began to fumble on the tray; then:

"He asked me to give you this as well, sir!"

And Ford extended a tiny gold amulet. Sir Provost's expression altered strangely. He laid the card upon the table beside him.

"Ask Mr. el Bâhari to come in, Ford," he said. "You were quite right; he is a friend of mine, but I had forgotten his name."

A moment later a tall Egyptian came into the library, a man slenderly and delicately built wearing correct evening dress save for his scarlet tarbûsh. Just within the doorway he paused, regarding Sir Provost; and the gaze of his long, liquid dark eyes was indescribably compassionate, a look of gentle power which seemed to penetrate the flesh and see the soul.

Sir Provost rose, extending his hand. His expression was one almost of incredulity.

"Hermon el Bâhari?"

The latter inclined his head, came forward and took the outstretched hand in a peculiar grasp. The glances of the two men met. Then, as their grip relaxed, the Egyptian raised his right index finger. Upon it was a ring bearing a device resembling the head of a snake.

"You had not been told of my visit to London?" he said.

"No," Sir Provost replied; "but I believe I know what has made it necessary. Will you sit here?"

One who had known him well might have detected in his voice intense but repressed excitement. To the ordinary observer he must have appeared unmoved. As Hermon el Bâhari seated himself in a chair facing the famous psychic specialist the latter, who was watching his visitor fascinatedly, spoke again.

"I had never hoped to meet you in this life," he declared. "Having gone as far as I have gone, I had planned in the near future to revisit Egypt, and although I should have naturally made for Thebes, I should not have ventured——"

His visitor interrupted him with a gentle smile and with a graceful gesture.

"As it happens, it is *I* who seek *you*," he said. "What does it matter? We are brothers in the same cause. We study not for gain but for the betterment of mankind. Grades of knowledge there must be, but other distinctions"—he waved his hand again—"there are none among ourselves. I come to you as the most advanced member of our brotherhood in London."

Sir Provost bowed gravely.

"But not for this reason only, but because upon you a duty devolves."

Sir Provost lay back in his chair, his coffee forgotten, watching the speaker.

"The knowledge which study has amassed through the ages," the latter continued, "the things which are good and which have been disseminated, and the things which are evil but powerful, and which have been concealed, we know of, you and I."

"Of some of them," Sir Provost corrected, regarding the other almost with veneration. "I shall never know all."

"It is true," Hermon el Bâhari acknowledged. "Far as you have gone, you are not fit to know all; yet one unfit to know anything has grasped, and is wielding, powers which *I* dare not employ. It is this which I am here to tell you. I must be brief, for my time is short. You understand the series of seven cycles and why the span of incarnation is so strictly limited. You appreciate that a certain type of mentality, given properly directed study over a period exceeding that which is lawful, might acquire powers not meant to be wielded by any but the adept. This, then, has happened. There is, here in London, a man of superior intellect who has defied those laws which normally protect humanity from such phenomena. His studies have gone so far that he has even acquired one of the nine ultimate mysteries guarded by the group called 'She who loveth silence'!"

Sir Provost watched him intently. He did not seem to find cause for surprise in the speaker's command of English and in his entire absence of accent.

"Something of the truth you have learned," Hermon el Bâhari continued, "for you have sent your daughter away from what you believed to be the zone of danger."

Sir Provost started but did not speak.

"You were wise, but not sufficiently watchful. The thing you feared might have come to pass, but a power beyond even the highest human control intervened mercifully. Your daughter will return from Surrey tonight. From her you may learn many things. Almost,

my journey was unnecessary, for already I have been shown the end ordained to the evil dreams of this man who would defy God. He has been twice warned, and twice has rejected the warning. I came to recover that which he had stolen, but this is not to be. Guard yourself. He is about to receive the third and last warning. I am leaving these papers with you. Our enemy in due course will learn that the power for his destruction is vested in you. I do not fear for the result. That which was lost can never be regained; but we are resigned to its destruction."

* * *

Long after the departure of his extraordinary visitor Sir Provost sat alone in the library. He had that night set eyes upon one whom he had never hoped or expected to see. He had been charged with a duty, a terrible duty, with a responsibility greater than any he had ever known.

His cigar, forgotten, lay in an ash tray beside him, his coffee had grown cold. When more than half an hour had elapsed, he rang the bell and Ford appeared.

"Can you get me some more coffee, Ford?" Sir Provost asked.

"Certainly, sir."

Ford allowed himself one curious glance at his master, and then, placing the bottle of curaçao and a liqueur glass upon the table, he removed the coffee pot.

Nearly five minutes had elapsed, but Sir Provost had apparently not moved when the butler returned, bringing hot coffee. As he was about to go:

"You need not wait up, Ford," said Sir Provost,

"but Miss Jasmine will be returning to-night. You had better tell Mrs. Edwards and Clarice."

Ford bowed.

"At about what time shall I say she will be returning, Sir Provost?"

"I am afraid I can't tell you," was the reply. "It may be very late, even after midnight, but I wish everything to be prepared for her."

"Very good, sir."

Ford retired. As he did so, Sir Provost poured out a cup of coffee, and taking a fresh cigar from the box, lighted it, and crossed to a locked bureau. This he opened, and returning, took up a large sealed package which lay on the table and which had been left there by Hermon el Bâhari.

He stared at it silently for a while, then placed it in a little compartment beside a number of other documents and relocked the bureau. He returned to his chair and began to sip his coffee, glancing at the clock expectantly. He seemed to be turning something over in his mind.

Finally he stood up, and going out to the telephone, asked for a Reigate number—the number of Low Ketley.

Without much delay he was put through and presently found himself speaking to his sister. Checking her excited flow of words as gently as possible:

"I know all this," he said. "When did Jasmine leave, dear?"

"But how can you possibly know? Did you ask her to come back?"

"Not at all. I only learned of it to-night."

"She left with Mr. Carey in his car at nine o'clock."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE HOWLING DOGS

"VERY well," said Muir Torrington, speaking somewhat irritably, "I will be there as soon as possible. My car is locked up and I don't suppose for a moment that I shall find a taxi at three o'clock in the morning. But in any event I shall not be longer than ten minutes."

He hung up the receiver, returned to his table, and glanced regretfully at a large volume which lay open there, a sheet of pencilled notes beside it. He had been utterly absorbed in his task, hence the lateness of the hour; and this unexpected call upon his professional services was by no means welcome.

However, Mrs. Jack Lewisham, a recently acquired patient, was not to be denied. She represented a key to many doors hitherto closed to the young practitioner who so daringly had raised his flag in the heart of fashionable London. He closed the big volume, revealing the title: *Atomic Pathology—Gühl*, marked the place with his page of notes, and knocked out his pipe.

Then, discarding his dressing gown, he resumed his coat and started for the door.

From the man-servant who had called him he had been unable to gather many useful particulars, but the man was evidently frightened, which was significant.

Now, as he crossed from Conduit Street into Bruton Street, where a constable with whom he was acquainted gave him a cheery "Good morning, sir," he wondered if by chance Carey had also been burning the midnight oil.

Opposite his friend's rooms he paused for a moment, looking up at the windows; but he could discern no light, and he proceeded rapidly on his way. As he had anticipated, no cab appeared, but the distance was not great to Mrs. Lewisham's flat in Mount Street, and Torrington, approaching, found every window illuminated.

He was admitted without delay by a partially dressed man-servant whose pale, frightened face occasioned Torrington a sudden uneasiness. Therefore:

"What is the matter with Mrs. Lewisham?" he asked. "Has she met with an accident?"

"No, sir," the man replied. "Thank God, you are here. They can't wake her, sir!"

"Who are 'they'?" Torrington demanded, mounting the stairs.

"The women servants, sir."

"Major Lewisham is away, then?"

"Yes, sir, in Ireland."

They were in the lobby now, where a woman, probably the cook, wrapped in a flowered dressing gown, was seated shivering with cold, or fright, or both. As the man closed the door:

"Tell me briefly," said Torrington, "what happened. Did Mrs. Lewisham call for help?"

"No, sir," was the reply. "It wasn't that. It was the dogs that woke us."

"The dogs?"

"There are four kept in the flat, sir."

"I know," Torrington interjected.

"Well, sir, about half an hour ago they all started howling. It woke everybody. Everybody, that is, except Mrs. Lewisham. The women woke me up—I'm a heavy sleeper, you see—and told me that Nanette, Madame's maid, had knocked at her door and could get no reply."

"Where were the dogs?" Torrington interrupted.

"In a room at the back of the kitchen, sir, where they sleep."

"Oh, I see; go on."

"Well, it seemed very funny with all that howling, and after I had banged for a long time on her door, I ventured to open it. I turned on the light by the switch inside and then Nanette plucked up courage and went in. Just as she did so, and while the rest of us were standing in the hall, I thought I saw something moving on the balcony outside the window."

"Something? What sort of thing?"

"Well, sir"—the man hesitated—"I suppose it was the excitement, but it looked to me like a big monkey!"

"A big monkey?"

"Yes, sir, it sounds absurd, I know."

"What did you do?"

"Well, I couldn't go into Madame's bedroom, but I just heard Nanette cry out, 'What's the matter with Madame? I can't wake her,' and then I ran along to the next door, that of the Major's dressing room, which also opens on the balcony, sir, crossed to the window, and looked out."

"See anything?" asked Torrington.

"Yes, sir, I did. There was a funny-looking man, a stooping man, dressed in black, hurrying along Mount Street, not twenty yards away. He carried a bag."

"You opened the window, then, and went out on to the balcony?"

"I did, yes, sir."

"Can you give me no better description of this man?" Torrington asked excitedly.

"I am afraid not, sir. He disappeared into the next turning, but he was a horrible-looking person."

"Right," said Torrington, "I will see you later."

He walked rapidly across to a door on the left, opened it, and entered Mrs. Lewisham's bedroom.

A wild-eyed Frenchwoman, whom he recognized as Nanette, her maid, and an older woman whom he had not seen before, were bending over the bed. In it Mrs. Lewisham lay, and for a moment Torrington feared the worst. Her high colour had fled and her face was deathly pale.

"Oh! Doctor, Doctor!" cried the Frenchwoman. "I think she is dead!"

Torrington raised a limp wrist, paused for a moment, and could detect a faint pulse. There was a strong smell of Eau de Cologne, with which, evidently, the women had been endeavouring to revive their mistress. A wineglassful of brandy stood upon the side table. Torrington looked across at the older woman. She was concerned but self-possessed. Therefore:

"Nanette," he said, "you can go now. I will call if I want you."

"Oh! Monsieur——" she began.

"Please go," said Torrington.

Nanette went, wringing her hands despairfully, and he turned to the other servant.

"Tell me all you know of this matter," he directed.

And whilst the woman, in a hushed voice, did so, he listened to the beating of his patient's heart and slowly grew more and more puzzled. The pulse was small and hard and the extremities were cold. Torrington asked the anxious woman a number of professional questions without eliciting anything useful.

The superstitious construction put upon the howling of the dogs was to be read in the faces of all the members of the household. But the odd circumstance had merely added to Torrington's mystification, until the story of that slinking figure in Mount Street had aroused a dormant memory.

In what way did he associate such a figure with the howling of dogs?

Suddenly, now, as he bent over the unconscious woman, the two happenings formed a contact and the memory was rekindled. On that night in Limehouse, when the half-caste had died, somewhere in the immediate neighbourhood a dog had been howling mournfully!

He looked down with strained attention at the pale face of Mrs. Lewisham; then:

"Help me to lift her up," he directed—"gently."

They raised her, a seemingly lifeless thing; and a rapid examination revealed a significant but horrible fact. She bore a mark resembling that made by a hypodermic needle, identical with the mark found at the post mortem upon the body of the woman who had

died in Chinatown! The train of evidence was complete.

"Good God!" Torrington muttered under his breath.

He was face to face with a crisis in his professional career. Every moment was of value, yet knowing what he knew of the complexity of the case, he rejected, one after another, every remedy that occurred to him. If Mrs. Lewisham died, his career would be ruined, for he would be accused of neglecting the most obvious and elementary specifics. He closed his eyes in a tremendous effort of concentration. He had assisted at the post-mortem examination in the East End, and he was endeavouring to visualize the salient features of the case.

The organs had been healthy with the exception of the brain; the condition of the latter had been obscure and unusual. Torrington groaned inwardly. His patient's life was at stake, and he knew it well. Inertia on his part meant her death; the wrong remedy could only hasten it.

Therefore he must sail upon uncharted seas, trusting to guess-work or inspiration to guide him. He opened his eyes and looked down again at the patient. Then:

"Quickly," he said, "fill a bath with boiling hot water and tell the man out there to dress. I am sending him to my house. He must run all the way there and all the way back. Where is the telephone?"

CHAPTER XXIX

CONCERNING BENJAMIN TEAK

BENJAMIN TEAK, sometime a chief officer in the United States mercantile marine, had long ago lost his ticket for gross malpractices. New York has sent some tough men to sea, and Teak lived fully up to his name and the reputation of his class.

He had been a capable seaman and would have made an excellent pirate. This career being closed to him, he had proceeded to make the best of things ashore, and had engaged in a number of enterprises demanding strength and physical courage, together with complete unscrupulousness, not without a certain measure of success. He was a man who never remained very long in one place. In him, the wanderlust was strong.

So, sometimes affluent, sometimes needy, but always open to any job which promised a speedy return, he had drifted one fine day into the city of Moscow.

The condition of Russia at the time was not attractive from an ordinary traveller's point of view. Tourist agents were not including Moscow in any of their itineraries. But to Teak and others of his class Russia was a magnet. Dangers did not appal him—he had survived many; but amid social disorders, as he had learned in South America, there is always a prospect of loot.

The adventure, nevertheless, had proved unprofitable up to the time that Fate introduced him to Doctor Weissler and Herr Krauss.

Returning late one night from a café to his lodgings, Teak, crossing the end of a narrow by-way, beheld a fight for life taking place in the sanctified shadows of an ancient monastery.

Such spectacles were not unusual in Moscow at the time, nor were they unfamiliar throughout the memories of Teak's life. But this particular conflict had unique features.

Of the pair engaged in it one—an elderly man endowed with a profusion of white hair—was dressed as well as it was discreet to dress in Moscow under existing conditions, whilst the other, a hirsute, black-bearded creature with incredibly long arms, seemed to belong to the artisan class.

Teak, unnoticed by the combatants, paused a few steps from the corner, watching the fight. The bearded fighter clearly possessed abnormal strength; so much so, that by degrees he was overcoming the other, a powerfully built man, and for all his advancing years, no mean adversary. Save for a panting like that of animals in conflict, with, sometimes, a sibilant breath visible like smoke in the ice-cold air, they fought silently, the hairy man point by point gaining the advantage. Teak scratched his chin reflectively.

Interference might result in arrest; these were queer times. On the other hand, it might result in profit. Thus far, he had drawn blank in Moscow. He was a man of quick decision and he decided to gamble.

In ten seconds he was on the spot. The long-armed,

bearded man, who on closer inspection proved to be even more hideous than he had supposed, had now secured a stranglehold upon his opponent and was slowly crushing life from the latter.

Teak bent forward, clasping his big hands around the hairy throat of the victor. A gurgling cry—a gasp—and the strangling fingers relaxed. Teak threw the fellow on his back and stood waiting for what was to come.

The older man, lying with his head almost touching the wall of the monastery, began to inhale painful, sobbing breaths; and Teak, staring down at him, made a remarkable discovery. The snowy locks were false—a wig! It had become disarranged; and beneath it appeared the stranger's own virile, close-curling red hair!

Teak whistled softly—then side-stepped, ducked, and encountered one of the big thrills of his life.

Before his experienced calculations had allowed as possible, the other, hideous ape-like abortion, was on his feet again, had cunningly dodged a lead-off with the left calculated to fell an Argentine mule, and had closed.

Teak, to his consternation, found himself engaged in a life-or-death struggle with a creature apparently possessed of the strength of an orang-outang! He could have given his opponent the better part of three stone, yet when at last he conquered, and the man lay groaning at his feet, he realized that he was dangerously near the end of his own resources.

This proved to be a turning point in Teak's career. That very night he was introduced to Doctor Weissler's establishment in Moscow and offered immediate employment on the staff of this singular scientist. The Doctor, fully aware that his rescuer had detected the

disguise, offered an explanation, characterized by reticence, which represented him to be an enemy of the Soviet Government. Teak kept his own counsel. The exact nature of his duties was far from clear. That he was to act as bodyguard for his employer he speedily learned.

Krauss, the name by which the bearded creature was known, he discovered to be Doctor Weissler's partner in the undefined enterprise which engaged them in Moscow. Weissler, in whom Teak was not slow to recognize a clever man and a dangerous enemy, conveyed, without definitely stating it for a fact, that Krauss at times became subject to a form of homicidal mania, a heritage of experiences during the late war. It would be one of Teak's duties to curb these outbursts, as, on this eventful night, he had shown himself capable of doing.

Teak reserved any criticisms which may have occurred to him at the time, and gratefully accepted the offer, persuaded that nothing but a criminal secret could bind any man of culture to such a creature as Krauss. This secret Teak proposed to learn, and to employ the information for his personal profit.

In the cellars of the house he was shown a number of furnaces and was introduced to a certain Mr. Michael, a distinguished-looking Russian gentleman with whom, Doctor Weissler informed him, he would take watches in the furnace room.

"Hitherto, either Mr. Krauss or myself have been compelled to relieve Mr. Michael," the Doctor explained; "and for some time I have been looking for a reliable assistant."

Certain crucibles had to be kept at a high, even temperature for many hours. The degree varied in the case of each of the six furnaces in operation. There was a chart upon which these particulars were clearly marked and a sort of log-book in which entries must be made every half hour. It was mechanical labour, but extreme care was demanded in maintaining the exact degrees of heat.

The matter was settled, and Teak returned to his lodgings for his scanty belongings. He fell asleep whilst he was packing his grip, and was awakened by an evil-looking man having close-cropped black hair and a yellow, parchment skin. This was Dimitri, Doctor Weissler's confidential servant.

This association, so strangely commenced, continued without much friction for many months—indeed nearly up to the time that Doctor Weissler left Moscow. Save for one maniacal outburst by Krauss, Teak's duties had not proved exacting. On the other hand, so skilfully was the place conducted that he had made very little headway with his own private schemes.

Mr. Michael he had been compelled to give up as a bad job; he was utterly unapproachable, and treated Teak, although always with courtesy, as a person socially beneath his notice. Dimitri he hated, and this hatred was mutual; so that save for Krauss, who had resented his presence from the outset, his sources of information respecting the many things which puzzled him were few.

Finally, Fate, which had first opened the door of this mystery house to Teak, again took a hand.

One day, entering Doctor Weissler's room when the

Doctor was temporarily absent, he found upon the table a little heap of almost priceless church ornaments —jewelled loot of some cathedral of the old régime!

Whilst he was eagerly examining this treasure, a slight sound brought him about. Doctor Weissler stood in the doorway behind him; and Teak, bracing himself to meet the gaze of the greenish-brown eyes, revealed upon his rugged face something of what was passing in his mind.

The brief conversation which followed he never forgot—since Weissler brought it to a close by showing him a signed statement in his, Teak's, own indisputable handwriting, wherein were certain details with dates and names of witnesses, which must have assured Teak's imprisonment in New York, Buenos Ayres, or Paris!

It bore the date of the day on which he had entered Weissler's service; and whilst on the one hand he was prepared to stake his life upon the fact that he had not written it, on the other hand he could conscientiously take oath that the writing was his own! Furthermore, there were things set down unknown to any other living man.

Benjamin Teak did not possess an imaginative mind, but he had common sense enough to realize both at this time and later that about Doctor Weissler, his employer, there was much that was abnormal. Many were the hours he wasted in clumsy retrospection, seeking a clue to the time and place at which that appalling statement of his own misdeeds had been written. A sort of inward fear of these mysterious people began to take possession of him. Sometimes at night, as he

sat watching the furnaces, this fear would come. It was not physical; in a physical sense he feared Krauss, because of the man's superhuman strength; but it was not fear of a sudden attack which haunted the night watches. It was something worse, something which Teak lacked the subtlety of mind to define.

Of the insanity of Krauss he entertained no doubt—in fact, he regarded the ape-man as scarcely human; but the character of Weissler defied him.

The source of his apparently inexhaustible wealth was a most provoking mystery. That it was crooked Teak never questioned; that except for his handsome salary he had no share in it was a scorn and a reproach. Yet he could make no headway.

There were three rooms in the house in Moscow which he had never entered, and one of his duties—in which he sought vainly to find a clue to the mystery—was instantly to report to Weissler the presence of any Oriental in the neighbourhood, particularly a tall man looking like an Egyptian.

As the months wore on it dawned upon Teak that he was being used as a mere tool in some gigantic criminal enterprise. Then, at a few days' notice, the house was dismantled. He found himself entrained for Paris with instructions to report to an address at Batignolles.

In Paris Doctor Weissler inaugurated the system afterward pursued in London, of conducting two distinct establishments and living two carefully separated lives. In one of these existences he threw off the disguise—the florid make-up, glasses, and snowy wig—associated with that secret, furtive quest of nature's mysteries. He lived in the sun; revealing himself,

splendidly, to an astonished capital as Anton de Trepniak, a wealthy international.

At a dilapidated works which had been rented by Dimitri the famous furnaces were installed. Here Doctor Weissler presided, but Trepniak was unknown. In a palatial residence near the Bois de Boulogne, leased from a Jewish financier weary of the lady who had occupied it, M. de Trepniak entertained the smartest people in Paris. Here Doctor Weissler was unknown and Mr. Michael never came.

Krauss was occasionally present but always invisible, whilst Teak's duties sometimes took him to the palace in the Avenue and sometimes to the derelict factory at Batignolles. His dreams, however, remained unrealized. A great part of Trepniak's life in Paris was a closed book to him. He began to realize that this disability was common to every one of his associates, with the possible exception of Krauss.

The latter was now reconciled in a measure to Teak as a member of the group, but Teak instinctively avoided the deformed creature, distrustful of his motives and ever prepared to find the long, ape-like arms suddenly locked in steely strength about his body. On several occasions in Paris Krauss approached him furtively, urging him to keep a sharp lookout for an Egyptian who might wear a red cap or a blue turban.

Then came a time when Teak grew conscious of that same curious atmosphere of tension which had preceded their removal from Moscow.

In the privacy of his own comfortable room he paced up and down, beating his great fist into the palm of his left hand, and swearing wildly. They were going

to move again—he felt it coming; and he knew why, because of a long experience in crooked ways.

Trepniak had made Paris too hot to hold him, Trepniak. It had been the same in Moscow. The means by which he was enabled to live as formerly only Russian Grand-dukes could live, was in danger of official discovery. Yet he, Teak, with access to much which must necessarily be hidden from the authorities, knew no more to-day of the source of this wealth than he knew at the time that he first entered Trepniak's service in Russia.

His premonition proved to be accurate. Some three weeks later he found himself in London, installed as manager of Weissler & Company in Limehouse; and he became an astonished spectator of prodigality in Park Lane which exceeded even the insane luxury of Trepniak's life in Paris.

Dimitri was butler in the London establishment, and with him came the Nubian mutes who had astonished the French capital—Magrabi (an Egyptian eunuch) and a number of female servants none of whom spoke English. The latter, with Magrabi, were installed in a third establishment occupied by a beautiful Russian whom Trepniak had met in Paris.

And now, definite discord disturbed the former harmony of the group. Its cause was not easily discernible, but at last a day dawned when Teak obtained a further glimpse into the mystery.

CHAPTER XXX

THE ROOM IN THE TOWER

STEP by step Teak made his way along the dizzy parapet where only a steeplejack or a sailor could have found foothold. He had reached it by a route long contemplated and carefully mapped in his mind.

The Limehouse furnaces were cold to-night; otherwise, since it was nearly three o'clock, he must already have been on his way to the little lock-up garage where the two-seater was housed in which he performed his regular journeys from West to East, from East to West.

Far below him lay Park Lane, deserted as far as the eye could reach. Ahead and slightly above from a window of the tower room that strange blue light rose and fell, rose and fell.

Some few more perilous steps and the origin of this phenomenon which had provoked him for a long time would become apparent. A faint humming sound was audible, and Teak thought that he could distinguish the vibration of mechanism. This might have been an illusion, however, created by the quality of the humming sound.

He advanced cautiously, silent in his rubber-soled shoes. For so heavy a man he was very active and sure-footed, qualities demanded by this latter part of

his journey which indeed, one might have assumed, only a cat or a monkey could have accomplished successfully.

At last, a little breathless, and his heart beating more rapidly than usual, Teak raised himself upright upon a narrow chimney stack, one arm thrown about the metal pipe of the northernmost chimney, to find himself looking through a high-set, narrow window into that secret room which he had never entered—indeed to which he knew of no means of entrance.

He suppressed a gasp of astonishment.

A cold pang of fear, fear of that sort which he had never been able to define, struck at his heart. He had performed a feat of climbing to have taxed the courage of an experienced mountaineer or an acrobat, yet here, looking into a darkened room, he knew terror for the first time.

The humming sound had become louder, and now, as he stared through the window, he saw what looked at first like a revolving disk glittering strangely as if it reflected some distant blue light. This was a mirror, he thought, but nothing showed upon its surface. Then he saw that it was not a mirror. It was a globe; and it seemed to derive its strange luminance from the sky which it resembled in colour and clarity.

As he watched, almost doubting the evidence of his own senses, vague outlines began to form within the globe as if sketched in smoke. They sharpened; took definite shape. The blue light faded, and Teak beheld, as if projected by a miniature cinematograph upon an invisible screen, the vivid presentment of a large and elegantly furnished bed-chamber.

It was irregularly illuminated by moonlight which shone through the windows, and someone—the distance was too great to enable him at first to determine whether man or woman—lay in the bed. A voice spoke. It resembled the voice of Trepniak, yet in some subtle quality it differed.

"I am here," the voice said. "Obey me."

The figure in the bed started suddenly upright. It was that of a woman, for Teak now could see her bright red hair streaming over her shoulders.

"Sleep until I awaken you," the voice commanded.

The woman fell back again upon her pillows. Then came silence save for the ceaseless humming sound. The picture remained sharply defined in the blackness of the room. The windows through which moonlight streamed were clearly visible in this miniature representation; and now, as a black silhouette, an ape-like figure appeared there, apparently upon a balcony outside the room.

A long arm reached out, and inch by inch opened one of the windows, which already was ajar.

Bending forward in a horrible, crouching attitude, the intruder advanced toward the bed.

Teak closed his eyes for a moment, clutching dizzily for support. Was his reason deserting him? Was he awake? *What* was this thing at which he looked, and how was it produced?

In the crouching figure which had stolen into the shadows of the room he had recognized Krauss!

It was impossible to mistake the figure of the ape-man, and now, opening his eyes, Teak looked once more. Yes, it was still visible, that tiny room, like one in some

exquisite doll's house, but magically peopled with living creatures.

Half in light and half in shadow, Krauss was bending over the figure in the bed. For a moment the moonlight glittered brightly upon some surgical instrument which he held in his hand—then, abruptly, the picture vanished.

A stifled cry reached Teak's ears; there came the click of an electric switch, and a light sprang up in the tower room, clearly revealing the great beryl revolving upon its axis. Part of the metal roof above he could see from his position and a portion of one wall—but nothing else. Of the person or persons in the room he could obtain no glimpse; but:

"No, no!" cried a frenzied voice, which now he clearly identified as that of Trepniak. "Go away!" There followed a sound of hurried movement as though someone had run across the room. "You have no right to be here; you are dead—you are dead! Why do you mock me? Why do you torture me?"

A groaning cry followed the words, then:

"It was not my fault—it was not my fault!" the babbling voice continued brokenly, almost sobbingly. "Don't touch me, don't touch me! Merciful God! She is coming nearer!"

Teak, trembling wildly, began to climb down from his dizzy perch. Confusedly he wondered if his shaking limbs would betray him. He paused, closing his eyes again, fighting for self-control.

All the perils of that return journey presented themselves to him in a new guise. Of the sights and the sounds of the tower room he sought not to think, con-

centrating all the bulldog tenacity of purpose which was his upon the task of regaining physical composure.

At last, opening his eyes, he ventured. Babbling cries as of a man beset by a host of phantoms reached him from the open window. But his eyes glaring straight before him, he set out, moving rapidly.

The first and most dangerous part of the journey accomplished, he came to the parapet—hesitated—and then essayed it. Step by step he moved along, balancing like a tight-rope walker. He arrived safely at the end, and, lowering himself to a section of sloping roof, slid down perilously until one rubber-shod foot touched an iron gutter and he overhung the stone-paved yard far beneath.

Foot by foot he worked his way along, coming at last to a descending pipe which seemed to offer a frail support for so heavy a man. The effort was telling upon him. His heart seemed to be ready to burst in his breast, and perspiration almost blinded him.

Yet he only paused here long enough to inhale one deep breath, and then, bending down inch by inch, until it seemed that nothing could prevent his being precipitated into the yard below, he caught at the gutter with both hands, moved his right foot until it touched the descending pipe, and, by means of an athletic contortion, worked his way down until all his weight rested upon his arms.

With knees and feet he grasped the pipe. Now, releasing the gutter with his right hand, he transferred this also to the pipe. Finally, he allowed himself to slip downward until his left foot rested upon a window

ledge. The window was wide open. It was that of his own bedroom.

A moment later he literally threw himself into the room, heedless of noise and hurt, and lay prone upon the carpet, shaking, exhausted, terrified.

That night for the first time in many years he had thought of prayer; and now as he lay trembling on the floor of his own room he whispered words of thanks to Heaven. Great fear and great danger had cast him back into boyhood, into the years before he knew the evil of the world. Reaction would come, although now he did not realize the fact. Then, as he lay there, he heard his name called, faintly, in some distant part of the house. He rose unsteadily to his feet.

"Teak!"

It was drawing nearer.

"Teak!"

He staggered forward to the door—to make sure that it was locked, although he well remembered locking it before setting out on his perilous adventure.

"Teak!"

It was Trepniak who cried his name! Trepniak who was running wildly in the direction of his room!

Teak pressed his forehead, wet with perspiration, against the panels of the door, grasping the knob at once for support and with some obscure idea of excluding the intruder. Now, Trepniak was in the corridor, uttering short, hysterical cries; now he had thrown himself against the outside of the door; and:

"Teak!" he cried, and banged feebly upon the panel. "For God's sake let me in! For God's sake let me in!"

Teak swallowed noisily but did not speak; then:

"The door," Trepniak moaned—"Quick—quick! She is close behind me!"

Teak reached across to the switch and the room became lighted. This somewhat restored his courage, and:

"What is the matter?" he asked—and failed to recognize his own voice.

"Thank God you're awake! Open the door."

Teak that night had conceived a horror of his employer inexpressible in any terms known to him. But there was that in the pitiful sobbing voice which, in his present mood, spoke to some rudimentary good in the man. A moment longer he hesitated; then, unlocking the door, he threw it open.

Trepniak, his eyes glaring, his face twitching horribly, tottered in. A sort of deathly grin transfigured his pale face.

"Shut," he whispered. "Quick! shut the door."

He turned and retreated backward, his hands stretched out, his fingers quivering.

Teak, chilled icily, as though an Arctic breeze had blown into the room, slammed the door fast and locked it. He came about. . . . Trepniak, by the farther wall, was kneeling and staring with a glassy look of madness in the direction of the doorway. He raised his shaking hands, and:

"Teak," he whispered, almost inaudibly, "are you a Christian?"

Through all the horror which lay like a cloud on his mind Teak seemed to perceive a solution of some of those mysteries which hitherto had baffled him. Trepniak had declared Krauss to be mad, but the reverse of this was the truth. Trepniak was a madman!

It was a dreadful idea, but not so dreadful as the doubts which had preceded it; therefore:

"Yes," said Teak more steadily, realizing that he must humour the speaker. "I was raised Roman Catholic."

"Then, quick, quick!" Trepniak glanced rapidly from the closed door to Teak and then back again. "Have you anything, a rosary, a relic—anything belonging to your religion?"

Teak hesitated. In a little box amongst collar studs and similar odds and ends of the toilet was a tiny silver crucifix which long ago had ceased to possess the slightest religious significance for its owner, and which he had retained solely for its sentimental associations—associations with an almost forgotten past.

However, nodding grimly, and with the passage of every moment recovering self-confidence, he crossed to a chest of drawers, opened the top one, delved into a cardboard box and produced the little emblem.

"Hurry, hurry!" came from Trepniak. "Fasten it with something, with anything, to the door. Fasten it to the door, Teak—oh, God! Be quick!"

CHAPTER XXXI

AWAKENING

SIR PROVOST HOPE stood upright and stared across the bed at Muir Torrington.

"A brilliant piece of diagnosis, Torrington," he said. "You will go far."

Torrington's lined face, gaunt in the light of early morning, its gauntness accentuated by his unshaven condition, flushed slightly.

"Thank you, Sir Provost," he replied.

"Presently," Sir Provost added, "I shall ask you to explain how you came to your conclusions." He turned to the elderly housekeeper, who had assumed the duties of nurse, and: "Doctor Torrington and I will remain," he said. "At the slightest change, please call us. You know what to look for?"

The woman nodded confidently.

"Yes, sir," she replied.

The famous consultant and the young physician crossed the lobby into the dining room where refreshments had been set for them. And:

"You are not annoyed," Torrington began, "because I called you?"

"My dear fellow!"—Sir Provost raised his hand—"I should have been most annoyed if you had *not* called me; professionally and personally. This thing

strikes home, Torrington, as you know—although you don't know all. Indeed, it is unlikely that any one of us will ever know the whole truth."

Torrington, munching a sandwich, began to parade the room.

"I am not content to abide by that idea," he declared. "I am by way of being an optimist, and I look for big things from this strange business."

Sir Provost, helping himself sparingly to whisky and soda, nodded slowly.

"Don't look for too much," he warned. "One big thing has come of it already. By your treatment of the case of Mrs. Lewisham you have justified your choice of a profession. You were faced, Torrington, with a problem to have baffled a man of three times your experience. It was life or death. Any of the usual restoratives must have meant the latter. Nine men out of ten would have killed their patient. Yours is alive and, physically, almost normal."

"Ah!" Torrington began to walk back from the end of the room, his mouth full of sandwich, and a remaining fragment upheld in his right hand. "Physically, as you say, Sir Provost; but mentally, mentally? I put it to you: Why does she remain unconscious?"

Sir Provost Hope took out from his left waistcoat pocket the case which contained his tortoise-shell-rimmed spectacles and tapped it reflectively upon the table.

"I am not sure," he replied, "but I have a theory. One thing is certain. If you had not adopted the measures which you did adopt, she would have died as the woman in Limehouse died."

Torrington swooped down upon the decanter.

"To think," he muttered, "that I might have saved her, too! If I had only known—if I had only realized!"

His was the soul of the true healer, and Sir Provost Hope reached out and touched his arm.

"My dear fellow," he said, "it was only because you were present at the autopsy upon that unfortunate victim that you were enabled to deal so brilliantly with this second case. You are young and very ardent, Torrington, but remember that you are only human."

Torrington drank deep and gratefully, finished the sandwich, took a second, and resumed his promenade.

"Those marks!" he cried. "What the devil do they mean?"

"I don't know," Sir Provost confessed; "but I hope to learn. By degrees, Torrington, we are nearing the truth."

Torrington, returning to the table, stood looking down at the elder man, and:

"Sir Provost," he said, "the system of treatment which has made you famous is one, as you know, which hitherto I have failed properly to understand. To-night is a turning point in my career——"

"It is," the other interrupted. "You have accomplished the all but impossible."

Torrington's embarrassment was boyish in its intensity, but:

"To-night," he continued, "I begin to understand— I begin to understand that the most advanced text-books are only fit for junior students. I begin to see vast possibilities, some of which you have explored. Now, sir"—he rested his hands upon the table and stared

down into the peculiar blue eyes of the psychologist—"is hypnotic treatment of any use in the case of Mrs. Lewisham?"

Sir Provost shook his head.

"Not of the slightest," he replied. "At any rate"—he paused—"not if applied by myself."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," was the reply, and Sir Provost's blue eyes regarded him strangely, "that I failed with Madame Sabinov. I should fail with Mrs. Lewisham."

"Good God!" Torrington exclaimed. "Yes! I see. It is the same control! Heaven forgive me! I have neglected more than half of my proper studies."

"Never mind. You are still young, and I have things to tell you which may prove to be even more illuminating than the curious features of this case. But here is our nurse."

The dining-room door opened and the woman came in. She looked across at Sir Provost, and:

"I think she is waking, sir," she reported.

Quietly, all three returned to the sick-room. The self-possessed housekeeper resumed her seat, Torrington standing beside her, whilst Sir Provost crossed to the other side of the bed. Mrs. Lewisham, her eyes still closed, was moving uneasily, clasping and unclasping her hands, and turning her head from side to side.

Early workers of London were stirring in Mount Street. Some cheerful soul, whose musical education had been permanently interrupted by the war with Germany, marched along the pavement in hob-nailed boots, whistling "Tipperary." Occasionally carts rat-

tled by. But in the sick-room absolute silence prevailed, until Mrs. Lewisham opened her eyes, closed them again as if she found the light hurtful, and then, sitting suddenly upright, looked fearfully about her, as one who awakens in strange surroundings.

The housekeeper glanced rapidly at Sir Provost, but he shook his head. Reason was returning to Mrs. Lewisham's staring eyes. She had recognized Torrington, and:

"Doctor Torrington!" she whispered. " . . . the grey face—the grey face!"

Sir Provost exchanged a rapid glance with Muir Torrington.

"All's well," he said. "There is no need for me to remain. Come along to Half-Moon Street as soon as possible."

* * *

A few minutes later he walked into his own library. Douglas Carey was seated in an armchair staring with unseeing eyes at some volume which he had taken at random from the shelves. He started up as Sir Provost entered; and:

"What news, sir?" he asked.

Sir Provost nodded reassuringly.

"Torrington has saved her," he replied.

"But——" Carey began.

"Yes. It was as he suspected."

"Good God!" Carey dropped back again into his chair. "What does it all mean? Where is the beginning, and what is to be the end?"

Sir Provost Hope regarded him fixedly.

"The end," he replied, "will be Peace. 'The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small.' Scientifically, I am glad, Carey, to have lived in a generation which has witnessed a revolt, successful, to a point, against the higher laws. It opens up untold possibilities. The boundaries which we had marked to define what is ultimate in the human will have been moved. Vast, uncharted territories invite the adventurous. My studies have gone far—farther than you realize; but to-night I know that they were the studies of a child."

He paused, looking before him as one who peers into a misty cavern.

"Thank God Jasmine is back under your roof," Carey murmured. "I know now that she is safe."

Sir Provost Hope turned to him.

"Yes, I think she is safe," he said. "We may be on the side of the angels, Carey, but we have no more than a dim idea of the powers of Hell. Each generation is so smug in its discoveries, confident that its so-called 'laws' are immutable. Yet every one of us has lived to see those 'laws' turned upside down. We must go warily. We are only beginning to comprehend. A few hours ago I was visited in this room by a man who has transcended all ordinary human knowledge. Later I will explain, as far as is permissible; but here and now I may tell you that the enemy, whom yet we have to define, has successfully defied this man and all that he stands for, over a period of years. Torrington will be here presently, and although none of us is at his best, I think a brief council of war desirable. Each one has something to tell the other; all are involved in a common

danger. But although the chain of evidence is not complete, I think I may venture to say that few links are missing. Apart from our personal interests, we have a common interest, Carey: the cause of Humanity."

CHAPTER XXXII

THE FAR-FLUNG WEB

I SAW Sir John Nevinson to-night," said Carey; "or, rather"—glancing across to where the grey light of dawn was beginning to show through the curtains—"I saw him last night. The ramifications of this affair are even greater than I had supposed. It is positively colossal. At last a sort of common understanding has been reached between the responsible authorities of the several countries concerned, and there is no doubt that the person, or group of persons, which we three associate with the expression 'Grey Face' is engaged in a conspiracy surpassing any in history. That entire movement which may roughly be classified under the head of 'Bolshevism' is no more than an instrument of this directing power."

Muir Torrington interrupted excitedly:

"What do you think is the ultimate object?"

"I cannot even guess," Carey replied. "But it is certain that the closely guarded secret policies of the great nations are as an open book to this organization. Grey Face is playing a stupendous game of chess with the peoples of the world. A belief is growing in the highest quarters that the political unrest which disturbs almost every country one can think of just now is due, in a large measure, to this influence."

Muir Torrington began to walk up and down the library, and for a long time the sound of his footsteps alone disturbed the silence. Sir Provost Hope, seated by the table, tapped gently and silently with the case containing his spectacles. Carey, lying back in an armchair, stared thoughtfully straight before him. Then:

"'Let him who closes his eyes also close his mouth,'" Torrington quoted. "When we put our cards on the table, I am expecting to find that between us we hold all the big ones. The truth of this matter is so strange that even when I have had glimpses of it, I have found myself jibbing."

He pulled up in front of a bookcase, staring hard. Then, over his shoulder:

"Sir Provost," he said, "have you a copy of *Atomic Pathology* by the late Professor Gühl?"

"Yes," was the reply; "but it is not with his other works where you are looking. It is on the lower shelf by your left hand."

Torrington stooped, nodded, and pulled out the volume. Sir Provost was watching him intently; and:

"Why does this work interest you?" he asked.

"I have been studying it again," Torrington explained; "and in the light of recent events I begin to have a hazy glimmering of the port for which Gühl was steering at the time that he wrote it."

He carried the big book to the table and opened it immediately under the lamp. It contained a frontispiece—a portrait of the author—with a reproduction of his autograph: *Hadrian Ernst von Gühl.*

The celebrated pathologist was represented as a man advanced in years, heavily Teutonic, with strong,

fleshy features and a broad, bald forehead. He wore old-fashioned spectacles and was posed with his bearded chin resting in his hand. All three stared at the picture; and:

"When do you say this man died?" Carey asked.

"I am not quite sure," Sir Provost replied, glancing at Torrington. "The outbreak of war deprived us of news at about that time. But why do you ask?"

"Because," Carey replied slowly, "in some way his face is vaguely familiar. I was wondering if he had ever visited England in my time."

Torrington shook his head vigorously.

"I think not," he said; "I think not, my lad."

He closed the book, and, crossing, replaced it on the shelf, Sir Provost continuing to watch him curiously.

"In what way, Torrington," he asked, "do you find Gühl's theories of interest in relation to this other matter?"

Torrington turned his face in the speaker's direction.

"I am not sure," he answered; "the idea only came to me last night. In fact, I was at work upon it when I was interrupted by the call to Mrs. Lewisham."

"Ah!" Sir Provost nodded his head. "A very, very singular coincidence, Torrington."

Without giving the latter time for comment:

"We are passing through one of those phases of gross materialism," he continued, "which always seem to presage social upheaval, and even you, I strongly suspect, doubt the existence of powers higher than those which may be controlled by a suitable prescription."

"Pardon me, Sir Provost," Torrington interrupted. "I am by way of being a materialist—yes, I agree. But

latterly I have begun to learn the A B C of my business all over again from a new angle. No. I don't doubt the higher powers."

"Very well." Sir Provost smiled slightly. "Then I may say what I had in mind. One of the instruments of those higher powers is what we call coincidence, and I am wondering——" He paused for a moment, and then: "I am wondering," he repeated, "whether your obtaining possession of that phenomenal diamond is another of these 'coincidences' intended for our guidance?"

Carey looked up with a start.

"You puzzle me, sir," he declared.

Torrington's face exhibited blank bewilderment.

"You see," Sir Provost went on quietly, "the diamond in itself is supernormal. I happen to know something about diamonds, and the one which you showed me was a phenomenon, quite apart from the manner in which it came into your possession. In the first place, there are only half-a-dozen known stones of this size in the world: the Great Mogul, which is said to have weighed two hundred and eighty carats; the Orloff, one hundred and ninety-three; the Koh-i-Noor, somewhere about a hundred and six, I believe; the Regent, a hundred and thirty-six, and one or two others. Now, the diamond in your possession is a rose-cut brilliant of almost perfect water, weighing, I should estimate, fully a hundred and twenty carats."

He fixed his penetrating gaze upon Torrington.

"Do you realize," he said slowly, "that the thing cannot well be worth less than thirty thousand pounds, and might possibly fetch four or five times this amount?

Now, how does it happen that the existence of this treasure has remained unknown? All such stones are historical. If it had been a rough diamond, several explanations might have suggested themselves. It is cut, however, but"—he paused impressively—"it is not polished. Torrington! we are on the eve of stranger things than we have yet known.

"I spoke of your recent study of *Atomic Pathology* as a singular coincidence. It was not a coincidence. We three now in this room are instruments of those higher laws which we cannot control because we do not understand them. From now until a certain menace to the peace of the community has been removed there will be for us no coincidences and no accidents. This phenomenal diamond did not come haphazard into your possession. The stranger did not select you by accident. Providence guided his choice."

"It was no accident that prompted me to go down to Low Ketley last night," Carey interrupted. "Here the hand of Providence showed plainly."

Torrington whistled, and began to stride up and down the library again.

"If this goes on," he declared, "I shall end up a religious maniac. I am by way of it already."

"I doubt it," said Sir Provost drily; "but that your studies will become enlarged in the future is almost certain. I fear this council must break up, but before we part there are one or two points upon which I think I should enlighten you."

He closed his eyes, as was his custom in moments of deep reflection. Then:

"I was visited not many hours ago," he went on, "by

a man whose knowledge of Nature's laws exceeds that of almost any other living. He is what is termed, in the jargon of Occultism, an Adept; that is to say, he is a master of certain neglected sciences. I myself have gone some little way along the same road, and I think we shall all have a better grasp of the task which has been thrust upon us if I explain the nature of the danger which we have to meet.

"Briefly, then, to begin with a paradox, there is no such thing as discovery. All the forces controlled, or partially controlled, by modern science, have always been in existence, and at some period of the world's history have been used before—perhaps not in quite the same way as they are used to-day. They are natural treasures, and when a Marconi, an Edison, a Nikola Tesla, announces a discovery to the world, he is merely acting as the chosen agent of what I shall continue to call higher powers. In other words, the time has come when a dormant natural force may be given with benefit to the world.

"There is a law which prevents the premature issue of any such force. The very hour at which men should be permitted to speak to one another through space was ordained. There was no accident about it. It could not possibly have happened one hour earlier, or even one minute earlier. Baron von Reichenbach tried to 'discover' radio-activity in 1852; but he was more than a generation too early. And now, to come to the heart of the matter:

"There are only a certain number of forces in existence. Or—to make my meaning clearer—Nature's treasure chest of secrets is not a conjuror's cabinet.

Its contents may be counted and tabulated; and, as civilization advances, one after another is issued to humanity. When the time comes for the chest to be empty——"

"The world ends?" Carey suggested.

"Not at all," Sir Provost replied; "that particular civilization ends. Barbarism sweeps over it, effacing all that had been; and so, the endless cycle proceeds."

"But do you suggest," Torrington cried, "that there is any living human being who knows the sciences of the *future*—who understood the use of steam electricity before steam engines and dynamos were invented; who knows now all about radio-vision; who could tell us how to communicate with the other planets; who could sweep disease from the world, and prolong human life indefinitely! Do you mean to tell me——"

"I mean to tell you," Sir Provost interrupted quietly, "that there are several such people living amongst us to-day—yes; human beings like ourselves, curators of Nature's deathless secrets, of the powers for good or evil inherent in man and in Mother Earth; to whom the past and the future are one; to whom time and space are names but not realities; yet who are compelled, by immutable laws which they understand but do not control, to live as you and I live, bounded by much the same limitations. One of these advanced students visited me recently, and his visit was occasioned by an event such as only occurs once in many centuries. I refer to a premature discovery—a revolt against the higher laws.

"In brief, there is a man here, in London, who should not be living to-day, but who has rifled Nature's

treasure chest, and who threatened, at one time, to change the swing of the pendulum which regulates the history of humanity. He has unlocked forces for which the world is not ready——"

"And his name," Torrington shouted, "is Trepniak!"

Sir Provost fixed his strange blue eyes upon the speaker, and:

"You are wrong," he said, "his name is *not* Trepniak."

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE THIRD WARNING

TEAK, newly returned from Limehouse, came in from the bathroom, and, crossing to a chest of drawers, opened it in quest of a clean collar. Then, remembering that he had broken his stud, he took out a cardboard box in order to look for a spare stud which he believed he possessed. He found himself staring with unfamiliar curiosity at a small tarnished silver crucifix which lay among the odds and ends contained by the box. His rugged face became a mask of perplexity.

Slowly he turned, looking toward his open window through which sunlight streamed into the room. An uncanny memory had come to him—the memory, he determined, of some forgotten nightmare. It was that of a grey face, the face of a dead man, except that the eyes were alive and stared out like two points of light.

Teak raised his hand to his close-cropped skull and then sat down on the side of the bed to consider this matter. He was not an orderly thinker, and for a long time he wrestled with a series of confusing ideas which suddenly had presented themselves to his mind. One of them was suggested by the open window; another, in some way, by the little crucifix; there was a third which had to do with a pair of old rubber-soled shoes which he

had not worn for a long time. And all of them were linked mysteriously with that uncanny memory of the grey face.

Doggedly he stuck to his task. When had he dreamed of the grey face? He went back in watches, as was his sailorly habit, seeking to account for his movements during the preceding forty-eight hours. In this way he blundered upon a strange thing.

One whole night was a blank which defied his memory!

He could recall nothing of it except that the crucifix was associated in some way with the hiatus—rubber shoes, and the deathly grey face. His open window, too, had a part in it. He became aware of a curious chill somewhere deep within him, and he found himself reviewing the past almost fearfully. He found himself thinking of that extraordinary human document in his own handwriting which was possessed by Trepniak.

What had he done in those lost hours? To what had he now committed himself? Life was sufficiently complex without this added doubt.

Teak experienced a sudden desire for the open seas, for racing clouds above him with no land in sight; for the taste of salt on his lips and the sting in his eyes of a wind from the Western Ocean. Such were his tangled thoughts when the telephone bell rang. He aroused himself, stood up, and, crossing to the instrument:

"Yes?" he said.

Trepniak's voice answered:

"Will you please come down to the library, Teak, at once?"

"Yes," said Teak again, and hung up the receiver.

He hastened through the rest of his toilet, and going down to the library, found Trepniak seated at the big table there, awaiting him.

"What news, Teak?" he asked.

"Well," Teak reported, "I don't like the look of things at all. A blasted Scotland Yard man has been prowling around down there."

"Do you mean he has been to the works?"

"No, not actually," Teak replied, "but he's got a line on us, right enough. It wouldn't have mattered a week ago, but as Michael is locked up in the cellar, it's more than a trifle awkward. Regarding said Michael, I should be glad of instructions. It was in accordance with your orders that I put him to sleep, but I should like to point out that he can't stay there for ever. In the first place, I am tired of acting as his nurse-maid, and in the second place, with the police around, it's asking for trouble."

Trepniak fixed his peculiar regard upon the speaker and:

"You are quite right, Teak," he admitted, "but if I had felt in need of your advice I should have asked for it. Have you anything further to report?"

"Yes," Teak answered sharply. "I have seen the same Scotland Yard man here in Park Lane. I saw him twice this afternoon."

Trepniak nodded. "Very good," he said. "Now, Teak, you hold a shipmaster's certificate, I believe?"

"I *did*," Teak corrected, "although I never sailed as skipper. But"—he smiled grimly—"I haven't got it now!"

"Possibly not," Trepniak continued, "but you have

your knowledge. I have decided to leave London. As I wish to take a number of people with me, it is my intention to buy a sea-going yacht. I want you to proceed to Southampton to-morrow in order to open negotiations with a firm who have such a vessel for disposal."

"Oh!" said Teak, "that's good hearing. Will it be a long cruise?"

"Not very long," the other replied. "I have decided to visit America."

As he spoke the last word Trepniak started up from his chair, his eyes fixed glassily upon the opposite wall in which that door was concealed which communicated with the secret study. He uttered a horrifying cry which seemed to tell of sudden agony. Then, falling back, his jaws clenched, he sat staring fixedly before him.

Teak sprang forward.

"What's the matter?" he demanded. "Are you ill?"

Trepniak did not stir a muscle, but sat there like a carven man, staring—staring unmovedly.

"Mr. de Trepniak!" said Teak urgently.

He bent over the table, grasping his employer's shoulder; and, as he did so, a horrible doubt leapt to his mind. He looked into the glaring sightless eyes—he touched the white face.

Trepniak was rigid.

"My God!" Teak groaned. "He's dead!"

* * *

Trepniak experienced a deathly chill, with instantaneous rigour; the fire of life died out of him, and it

seemed that ice flowed into his veins. He knew all the pangs of dissolution—he recognized them; realized what had happened. Teak's frightened cry, "My God! He's dead!" was the last thing he sentiently knew.

A voice called his name, and he swept up, as if borne upon a breeze, through every solid obstacle into his secret laboratory in the tower. There was a new, strange joy in this freedom. An urgent longing came to him to pass beyond the confines of the world, but something trammelled him—a tenuous cord, invisible, delicate, yet competent to enchain his straining spirit.

Hermon el Bâhari stood with folded arms awaiting him.

In his expression there was no anger. His classically beautiful face resembled a mask of gentle melancholy. The power of his eyes dismissed the chimera of the world, and these two were alone in boundless space; not the accused and his accuser, but the tardy penitent and the spiritual father.

"My brother, you tamper with that which is immortal. You build for yourself a house of dreadful doom. You threaten with ignominy those who are worthy. Your great accomplishments entitle you to a high place, but pride of will has brought you low. The power you seek is not within mortal grasp. The path you follow is a forbidden path. That moral laws are but instruments of government we know; yet only the pure may break them, under the highest guidance.

"Three times you have seen me in the flesh. In Cairo I came to you as a friend; you rejected me. A second time I sought you out in a place in Persia which I need not name; but you were deaf to my coun-

sels. At great personal inconvenience I followed you to Moscow—but my journey was fruitless. Yet, because the highest law is that of compassion, it was decided to appeal to your second self, and upon me the task again was laid.

"You were warned, super-sensually, in Paris. But your lower nature, dominated by pride of will, conquered, and the seed never developed. A second time you passed through the gates of death, and here, on this spot, you were shown your end, the only end which can be to a conflict with God. You were watched; and the result is that a third time I come to you.

"It is the last time.

"The lower man, the creation of your own immense knowledge, will return again to the world you seek to remodel. Pursue your former path, and the science which you think you command will destroy you, as well as the unhappy creature who shares your fate, and whose existence is offensive to Heaven. This is your last warning, of which, when you live again, your brain will know nothing, but your spirit—knowing—can win freedom if it be strong enough."

A great agony, an agony almost unendurable, claimed Trepniak. A remorseless cord tightened about his heart. He fought with this torture; foam rose to his lips. He threw off something which restrained him—and staggered upright.

He began to babble incoherently. A series of purple veils seemed to be raised one after another before his eyes; and, panting, shaken, he fell back again into the chair in the library, looking up to the quivering face of Dimitri who stood at his right, and thence to the pale,

terror-stricken countenance of Teak, who had sought to grasp him when in that agonized return from death to life he had leapt upright.

Then both these were forgotten, and he stared across the big table at one who stood there watching him. Slowly, recognition came. It was Doctor Muir Torrington.

Torrington spoke.

"Good," he said, nodding his head slowly; "don't distress yourself. You have made an astonishing recovery. I have to warn you, however: the next attack of this kind will be the last."

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE ALCHEMIST

"NOT a little bit?" Jasmine challenged, snuggling closer to Carey.

"Not the least little bit in the world," he assured her.

"But she is very fascinating. Lots of men must have envied you."

"There are even more who would envy me now," he replied.

Jasmine tilted her head so that it rested on his shoulder. She sighed contentedly.

"When you *do* pay compliments," she said, "you manage it very prettily."

There was silence between them for a while. Sitting unnecessarily close together in the big car, in that sort of waking dream which is a communion of which only lovers may partake, Carey was discovering that love is an alchemist who can transmute old sorrows into new joys.

As they passed along Piccadilly he recalled happily those lonely nights of doubt when he had tramped this very route, seeking to drown a present wretchedness in memories of a brighter past. Foremost in his musings loomed the most dreadful night of all, the night when Ford had said, "Miss Jasmine is out of

town, sir, and Sir Provost is not at home." As the car came out of Half-Moon Street into Piccadilly he turned and looked back at the lighted windows of a club.

Years seemed to have elapsed since he had seen Murchison seated in that very club and had longed to talk to him. Yonder was the corner upon which he had stood hesitating, wondering whether Murchison would understand. How strange, he thought, that this old bitterness now magically became woven into a pattern of joy.

To-night, as on that distant night, every lighted car seemed to contain a pair of happy lovers, pleasure bound. It was a joyous parade of piquant, flower-like women nestling amid furry theatre cloaks; of well-groomed, self-satisfied men; of careless gaiety, untroubled by doubt, untouched by the sordid things of the world. Once, it had seemed a taunting panorama of youth and laughter, of an Arcady where sadness could gain no admittance; to-night it was an Arcady, but he was of the Arcadians.

Opposite the Ritz they were held up by a block in the traffic, and a flower-seller, a tired-eyed, gipsy-looking creature, leaned in at the open window.

"Beautiful roses, sir," she said, "a bunch of roses for the lady?"

For Jasmine to squeeze his hand was wholly unnecessary. The magical transmutation was complete. He remembered the woman. She belonged to that night of unhappiness upon which now he dwelled so lovingly.

"I will take them all," he said, opening the door. "Put them in here on the seat."

"God bless you, sir!" the flower-seller exclaimed,

scarce crediting her good luck. "I am sure you will always be very happy."

He gave her twice the price for which he could have bought the roses at Gérard's, and, as the car moved on, laughed loudly and joyously. He threw his arms around Jasmine and kissed her as she had dreamed of being kissed.

Breathless, she drew back, pressing her hand against his lips, and, looking at him with glowing, half-frightened eyes:

"Douglas!" she said, but the rebuke was an invitation.

"I don't care!" he cried. "To-night I care for nothing except that I have got you and am never going to let you go again."

"Surely," she whispered, "I am entitled to be consulted?"

But she was glad, wholly, wildly glad, that he claimed her—that his love was not a plaint, a half-frightened query, but a demand, a claim. It was this which she had missed in him: it was this which he had failed to discover in himself.

Now, in this mutual recognition of absolute surrender and unquestionable possession, there was that perfect happiness which belongs to such rare moments; which comes perhaps but once in each short life. Jasmine yielded her lips to him with a sweet submission which opened a new page of life for her lover. The slender, frail wonder of womanhood which he held in his arms belonged to him now; to lift to great heights or to cast down into utter degradation; to be a crown if he should rise above his fellow men, to be an ever-present rebuke,

a phantom, if he should fail. All the pageant of man's history swept through his mind, inciting him. In that brief moment of exaltation the future was bathed in golden light—the past was glorious with delicious memories.

Outside the Adelphi Theatre and in sight of their destination the car was detained for a long time; and:

"Of course I know, now," said Jasmine, "that when you told me you had never seen Madame Sabinov before that night—you remember the night?—you were telling me the truth. I know you telephoned and wrote to me. But I shall never be happy until you have made me understand all this mystery, Douglas. I mean, why Daddy has taken away my dear little cigarette box which you gave me, and why I was always dreaming about the grey face at Low Ketley. But what I really wanted to ask you was this: Have you seen Madame Sabinov again?"

Complete sympathy between them had at last become established. If Douglas Carey could have possessed the wisdom of Sir Provost Hope, he must have welcomed this clairvoyance in Jasmine; but because, although he was a clever man, there were many things which he did not know, he merely wondered at the tone in which she asked the question. She knew; and, even had he been capable of it, denial would be useless. Therefore:

"Once," he replied; "I met her at Trepniak's."

"You have been to Trepniak's?" Jasmine exclaimed.

"Yes, and I met Madame Sabinov there."

"Oh!"

Jasmine stared for a while into the foyer of the Adelphi

Theatre, an object of interest to many passers-by, but herself oblivious of their existence; and Carey regarded a red-faced and irascible military gentleman, detained in a taxicab on the off-side of the car, in whom this traffic delay threatened to induce apoplexy.

"Was she sweet to you?" Jasmine asked softly.

"Don't speak of her like that," said Carey. "She means absolutely nothing to me. But, on the other hand, she is a dangerous woman. Presently I will try to explain to you what I mean."

Jasmine turned to him, her lips pressed together, her eyes half closed. It had been a dream journey throughout which he had worn the robes of an emperor, but now the robes slipped from him; his old diffidence returned, or threatened to return.

As Jasmine faced him, apologetic words suggested themselves. His instinct was to placate, to explain. Modern woman demands explanations, and Jasmine was essentially modern.

In time some primitive instinct came to Carey's aid: perhaps a memory of the half-frightened, breathless Jasmine who had shrunk back from the first real kiss of passion which he had ever given her. He grasped her shoulders firmly and looked into the beautiful challenging eyes.

"I refuse to quarrel with you about Madame Sabinov," he said. "She means nothing to me. You mean all there is in life. You must not read falseness into my words. I love you more than anything in the world. Let us be happy to-night."

She opposed him with mind and body for a moment; then, realizing that he was conquering with both:

"Douglas!" she protested—"people can see us!"

"I don't care," he said, drawing her close and kissing her. "Now be a good girl!"

The traffic barrier was raised, and a few minutes later, in the Savoy, Douglas and Jasmine were following the manager of the Café de Paris to a table near the window for which Carey had arranged over the telephone.

"I thought it would be a good idea," he explained, "for us to dine in the Grill. That was why I selected this table. We can watch people arriving at the theatre and go across to our seats at the very last moment."

It was the first night of a new play at the Savoy Theatre and Jasmine agreed that the arrangement was excellent. She was happy; and throughout the early part of dinner the shadow which had lain so blackly upon both their lives was not discussed; then:

"Douglas," said Jasmine, "there is something I want to ask you."

"What is it?"

"Do you know why I was sent down to Low Ketley?"

"Well!" Carey smiled a little awkwardly. "I think I understand why your father sent you, yes."

"Will you please tell me?"

"I don't know why I should not," he replied, "except that it is all a little complicated. You see, dear, you and I are involved in a common danger. Someone, a very dangerous and powerful 'someone,' was interested in learning a lot of government secrets which I happened to know, and was also interested in you."

"In me?" Jasmine exclaimed. "In what way?"

"My dear Jasmine!" Carey smiled at her across the table. "There could only be one way."

"Douglas!" Jasmine lifted her finger reprovingly. "If you are trying to pay me another compliment, this time you have done it very clumsily."

Carey laughed.

"But I was not," he protested. "I was merely speaking the truth."

"Then your compliments are not the truth?" Jasmine asked naïvely.

"No," Carey replied; "they fall short of it."

Jasmine raised her wine glass, gaiety restored and laughter in her eyes.

"Mr. Carey," she said, "I do protest you are a wag."

These two were very happy, and as the time drew near for the commencement of the performance at the theatre well-known "first-nighters" began to appear. Indeed, some of them were dining in the grill room, and now others walked or were driven up to the doors of the theatre. A great majority Jasmine had met socially, or at one of the many clubs to which she belonged; but Carey pointed out others belonging to circles which did not impinge Jasmine's. Several of the more distinguished critics were unknown to her, since they avoided frivolous functions and rarely or never visited the Embassy, the Grafton, or the Mayfair.

Jasmine found this rather puzzling. She knew so many of the men from Fleet Street that she had begun to believe she knew them all. She found these distinguished strangers very interesting, and:

"They must be awfully clever," was her comment.

Carey laughed aloud.

"I agree," he said. "A man who can dispense with social popularity to-day must be a true genius."

"Yes," Jasmine mused. "Some people seem to be able to get along by means of social popularity alone: M. de Trepniak, for instance."

Carey started. His expression changed, and:

"What made you speak of him?" he asked.

"I don't know. You dislike him, don't you?"

"Yes," Carey admitted. "Have you seen him recently?"

"No," she replied. "I can't imagine why you should dislike him, Douglas. He has always been very nice to me."

"Does he know that you have returned?"

"Not that I am aware of," Jasmine said, acutely conscious of the change of tone in Carey's voice. "Oh! I see it all!" She reached across the table, laying her hand upon Carey's sleeve, and: "Am I right?" she asked—"was it because of Trepniak I was sent down into Surrey?"

Carey met her glance frankly.

"Of that I cannot be sure," he replied, "but of this I can: Trepniak is an undesirable man to know. Avoid him if you can possibly do so. He is plausible, he is fascinating, but I am not at all sure——"

He hesitated.

"Yes?" Jasmine prompted; "please tell me."

"Well——" Carey appeared to be temporarily at a loss for words. "I must not say too much, but there are strange stories going about."

He was interrupted by the roaring approach of an electric-blue Farman, which swept aggressively into the court, turned, and was drawn up before the theatre. A dusky-faced footman, wearing a conspicuous uniform,

leapt down and opened the door. Another car which had been discharging passengers now moved off, affording an unobstructed view of the theatre entrance.

Trepniak alighted, wearing the soft black hat and French cape which formed an indispensable part of his evening attire. He extended a white-gloved hand, and Madame Sabinov, wrapped in a flame-coloured cloak, stepped down from the car. Her white neck and shoulders, and white hair dressed Pompadour fashion, lent her a strangely statuesque appearance, heightened by the warm tones of her theatre wrap.

Side by side they passed into the foyer, objects of extraordinary interest to the crowd of onlookers which a first night at a London theatre always attracts.

CHAPTER XXXV

LATER THE SAME NIGHT

"NO," SAID Madame Sabinov, "I am really rather tired. It was nice of you to take me to the first night of so strange a play, but if you don't mind, I should like you to drop me at the Ritz."

"Certainly," Trepniak agreed. "Have I ever sought to coerce you?"

"No," she replied dreamily, staring out of the window; "at least, I am not conscious that you have ever done so."

Trepniak suppressed a start; his self-control was masterful; and, taking a cue from her previous words:

"The play amused you?" he asked.

"Yes, it was very strange, but I doubt if it will be successful."

"Commercially it will not," Trepniak returned promptly. "It shows that the ideal of the civilized world of to-day—self-government—is nothing but mob rule. It shows that emancipated woman breeds a race of slave men. In short, it seeks to prove that the days of any empire are numbered when the rulers of that empire cease to command and begin to obey. Therefore, it is doomed to fail, because, in a community of the blind, one blessed with sight must be lynched, trodden underfoot. It is a play, Poppæa, based upon the wis-

dom of a man whose name survives as that of a great charlatan; of a man who *was* a great charlatan, but who was also a genius. I refer to Cagliostro. He said 'the secret of governing mankind is never to tell mankind the truth.'"

"He was right," Madame Sabinov declared, slightly turning her head toward the speaker. "What a pity he is not here to-day."

"Ah!" Trepniak lay back upon the cushions. "The Holy Office ended his career—wisely, from the point of view of the Holy Office. To-day the police, who are to the plebeians what the Prætorian Guard were to the Cæsars, would deal with him just as mercilessly. But here we are."

The dazzling Farman pulled up at the side entrance of the hotel. Trepniak's Asiatic footman leapt to the pavement and opened the door as a porter came down the steps. Trepniak hesitated, then:

"I have no desire to intrude, Poppæa," he said, "but there is something I wished to say to you to-night. May I come in for a moment?"

"Why, certainly," she replied; "please don't think I want to send you away."

They entered the hotel and sought a deserted corner of the lounge.

"What I have to say is this," Trepniak began at once. "I wish you to accept, not as a gift, but as something that I owe you, the deeds which you recently returned to me. No! A moment. Allow me to go on. The house has been stripped from roof to cellar; the appointments of which you disapproved are no more; but the property is yours, to sell, to let, or to occupy, as you

choose. The other provisions which I had made for you I wish you to retain—I will explain why. You have dismissed me, and I accept my dismissal, but I am leaving England almost immediately; we shall probably never meet again. You have meant more in my life than you will ever know. I am not a good man, but I am not ungenerous. I wish to be grateful. It is the last joy in your power to grant me. Can you refuse it?"

Not unmoved by his earnestness, Madame Sabinov turned her slow regard upon the speaker. She had foreseen this appeal and had dreaded it. Sir Provost Hope, whom she had consulted a second time, had given her guarded advice, the significance of which she could not misconstrue. If she would regain command of her soul she must definitely sever, in his own words, "the chief association" of her present life. This, down to the smallest trinket which linked her with it, she must put away. Sir Provost had refused to name the source of the influence which dominated her, but she had reasoned that it could only be that of Trepniak. Therefore:

"I am not ungrateful for your offer, Anton," she replied, "but already I am your debtor. No, please!" She stood up. "Truly, I am very tired. If on consideration I think I have done a wrong thing, I shall not hesitate to communicate with you. I don't mean by this that you are not to call upon me. Please come at any time you like. I have few engagements."

She held out her hand.

"Good-night. I have enjoyed the evening very much."

Trepniak stood looking at her, a curiously statuesque forbidding figure, the dead pallor of his face lending it, in the subdued light, an appearance like that of marble. His hand, when she touched it with her own, was cold; his lips scarcely moved, but:

"Good-night," he said.

She turned and walked away, leaving him there in the shadowy corner.

Her own room gained, she switched on all the lights, threw her wrap upon the bed, and sat down wearily, staring across at her own reflection in the mirror. To-night, for the first time, she had experienced fear of Trepniak. Fear of his house, of the people who surrounded him, she had always felt vaguely, but of the man himself none hitherto.

In Park Lane she had often believed herself to be watched. She had rarely remained long in any one of the singular rooms without receiving an impression that hidden behind some fanciful screen, concealed by the draperies before a door, lurking in the shadow of this or that ornate piece of furniture, was watching, always watching, some thing, some one, and waiting.

It had been the same in Paris. Now, on two recent occasions, either her imagination had tricked her, or she had obtained glimpses of a strange, deformed, almost inhuman creature who had disappeared as she approached the spot upon which she had detected, or thought she had detected, his presence. It occurred to her that Trepniak had had her watched since the outset of their friendship; that some hideous member of his household dogged her footsteps jealously. It would not have surprised her, whose mother's life had

begun in a *harêm*, yet it was distasteful, indeed insufferable.

More than once she had spoken of this to Trepniak, but he had denied any knowledge of the matter.

Her second interview with Sir Provost Hope had resulted in a definite change of outlook, however; annoyance had become fear, repulsion. She had followed his advice down to the smallest detail; and since thus punctiliously setting her affairs in order, she had ceased to experience those unaccountable lapses, those gaps in her memory, upon which no process of reasoning could throw any light.

She did not fear men. Early in life she had learned what the brute in man can be capable of at its worst. Upon this score she had no more to learn, but the shadow which twice she believed to have become visible was scarcely definable as a human being.

To-night her thoughts were ill company. She rang for coffee and sat sipping it and smoking a perfumed cigarette, boxes of which were regularly despatched to her, in whatever part of the world she might be, by a member of one of the few noble families of the Near East which had survived the universal revolution against ruling classes.

She walked across to the window, and, drawing the curtains aside, looked along Piccadilly in the direction of the Green Park.

There was a brilliant moon, and now, as the hour was after midnight and pedestrians were comparatively few, a desire for that sort of solitude which can only be known in the open air came to her insistently. She determined to put a long coat over her evening frock and to walk,

in the hope that exercise would bring physical weariness and thus induce sleep. She regretted having drunk coffee. It was a habit due to a long familiarity with late hours; but the peace of sleep was all she asked of to-night.

Wearing a long dark coat and a tightly fitting black hat, she set out, turning into St. James's Street and walking down in the direction of the Palace. She had no more definite object in view than enjoyment of a perfect night and defeat of the fiend, insomnia, which threatened her.

She passed the Palace and came out on the Mall, its many lights competing with the moon, but whose guardian trees defied nature and art alike fashioning long aisles of shadows. She turned westward to where in the distance the Victoria Memorial beckoned whitely.

Here she found unexpected peace. A faint, cool breeze coming from the direction of the lake in St. James's Park was welcome after an evening spent in enclosed and crowded places. Few people were abroad, although an irregular procession of taxicabs followed the prescribed route from Victoria Station along the Mall and round through Marlborough Gate.

Her thoughts became retrospective and sadness threatened her. In an attempt physically to conquer this mental attitude, to run away, as it were, from old sorrows, she hastened her steps. She had chosen the shadowy path on the right of the trees, and, because her mind was elsewhere, had scarcely noticed the presence of a two-seater drawn up beside the pavement and apparently unoccupied.

Some little distance she had gone when she became

aware of a growing uneasiness intruding, a present influence, on her reflections of the past. She noted it no more than subconsciously. It was a warning, not powerful enough to recall her from a dream-world of sweeter things into which she had slipped.

Then, suddenly, feverishly, but too late, she realized that some silent danger was following her—had overtaken her!

Hideously long arms, possessing a steely strength, locked themselves about her body. A large, soft pad, saturated with a sickly sweet anesthetic, was pressed over her mouth and nostrils. Stifled, breathless, unable to cry out, she was lifted from her feet, and, in the act of being lifted, unconsciousness began to claim her.

She bit savagely at the hand which held the pad, and felt a stinging moisture upon her lips. In her frenzy she inhaled deeply of the anesthetic and knew that she was lost.

The uplifting movement seemed to continue indefinitely. The steely clutch was forgotten: she seemed to be rising up and up and up to dizzy heights where murmurous voices were around her, where familiar faces appeared and vanished. Old, forgotten love phrases were whispered in her ears, then all merged into a sound of distant singing until silence came.

CHAPTER XXXVI

ECKO

CAREY had given Ecko leave to call upon Japanese friends staying in London. As these resided in the neighbourhood of Dulwich, it was tacitly understood that, provided Ecko appeared in Carey's room at ten o'clock in the morning with China tea and the daily papers, he should be at liberty to spend the night with his compatriots. Ecko, however, belonged to a race which in two generations or so had passed from bows and arrows to field artillery of the highest efficiency; from a nondescript collection of junks to a battle fleet that demanded serious recognition; from semi-barbarism to world power—a process of evolution from which the European nations had only emerged at the end of some six or seven hundred years.

This miracle (which many modern statesmen overlook) had been accomplished by that genius which is defined as an infinite capacity for taking pains.

Ecko was incapable of abusing generosity in an employer. The greater such generosity, the greater Ecko's efforts to deserve it. His present mission in life was to minister to the comfort of Douglas Carey. It was to the ultimate profit of Ecko that his mission should be well and truly performed. No impetuous behaviour on Carey's part could affect this outlook, which was racial.

Therefore, Ecko returned by the last train from Dulwich; and, shortly after twelve o'clock, since the night was fine, he set out to walk from Victoria to Bruton Street. He had a confession to make and an explanation to offer. From experience he judged that Carey would not be home before one A. M., and therefore he would be in ample time to see him before he retired.

Whilst dressing that evening for the visit to his friends, Carey having already departed for Half Moon Street, Ecko had made a remarkable discovery. He was a student of subjects the mere name of which must have stupefied the average English man-servant, and amongst his modest possessions was a Chinese bookmarker, a slip of figured ivory attached to which was a long silk beaded cord terminating in double green tassels.

It was thrust into a text-book of the higher mathematics, and, whilst he dressed, the glitter of the beads attracted his glance. Suddenly, unaccountably, he found himself thinking of a horrible grey face floating mistily before him. It was momentary, a mere impression, but startling and uncanny. It demanded an explanation.

Part of Ecko's studies touched this very province of the mind. Here was a practical illustration of theories with which he was familiar. He began to think, not at random, but in the manner of the trained reasoner; with the result that where many another had failed Ecko partially succeeded. His first discovery was notable enough. He found himself quite unable to remember at what time, or from whom, he had obtained the bookmarker.

Recognition of this phenomenon spurred him to renewed efforts, and without changing his plans for the evening—essentially, he was practical—he continued to think hard. He was rewarded. At about ten o'clock, and in the midst of an animated discussion with his friends, he suddenly discovered a link between the book-marker, the grey face, and the figure of an elegant woman stepping into a car at the corner of Bruton Street and Berkeley Square.

Returning in the train and having the compartment to himself, he focussed his keen mind upon these three associated points, seeking to link them more closely and to discover new associations. Partly, but not entirely, he succeeded, and as he walked along the Mall his brain remained busy with this problem which struck at the very roots of his racial traditions.

Absorbed in his obscure reflections, he was on the point of turning toward Marlborough Gate when his attention was arrested by a figure, that of a woman, which seemed to belong, not to reality, but to those provoking, indeterminate memories which to-night, by dogged perseverance and sheer force of will, he had been seeking to trap and more closely to examine. As he approached the corner, she came toward him, wearing a long, dark cloak and a black hat. Her features he could not see, but her shape, her carriage, the entire personality of the woman, struck a familiar chord, drove him from speculation on to the physical plane. He knew beyond any possibility of doubt that this was she whose image he associated with the shadowy grey face and the Chinese book-marker. He knew it because the sight of her had instantly enlarged those vague memories.

Plainly he could see her walking along Bruton Street—with just that swift, lithe movement. He could see the footman holding open the door of the car, could see her enter. He remembered the occasion—and what it had portended. He was sure.

Therefore he now stepped aside quickly, and unseen; allowed the woman to pass him.

He managed to obtain a glimpse of her face, but it proved to be unfamiliar. This fact did not disturb his conviction; for, as she passed a lamp, he received a momentary impression of white hair beneath her black hat. The memory was complete.

The woman whom he had watched walking along Bruton Street had had this youthful shape, this white hair. It came back to him how he had thought at the time that she must be wearing a silk wig—a Paris fashion then in vogue.

She passed him, turned to the right, and proceeded along the Mall in the shadow of the trees.

Ecko, knowing instinctively that the receding figure was a link in a mysterious chain, hesitated—but only for a moment. Here was a chance to amplify the confession which he had to make. If he could learn the identity of this woman, perhaps it might bring further enlightenment.

He turned and followed. He was disposed to think, from a certain carelessness in her attire, that she was merely taking a moonlight walk and would presently retrace her steps. Therefore he maintained a discreet distance but never lost sight of her.

This encounter had aided enormously the mental task which he had set himself. Not once, but twice he

had seen her. On each occasion the grey face had in some way been associated with her presence. There was something else, too; something concerning Carey; something which continued to elude him; a missing datum which he believed his employer would be able to supply.

Ecko's sturdy little figure merged with true Oriental stealth into the shadows under the trees. Ahead of him the mysterious woman walked, her distinctive carriage provoking him, sending his mind back over the past, beyond the episodes of those two strange nights and into the East out of which he came.

A thought presented itself, an explanation, only to be immediately dismissed. Ecko understood the art of focussing. He was not to be thus diverted from his purpose, mental or physical.

Then, about halfway along the nearly deserted Mall, violent drama intruded upon the comedy.

Dimly he became aware of the presence of a second stealthy figure between himself and his quarry—of one who was closing in upon the woman step by step. Where this figure crossed vague patches of light it presented the appearance of a huge baboon.

Ecko began to question his own powers of observation. He hastened his steps, drawing slightly nearer. He was still nearly twenty yards from the scene when the incredible thing happened—incredible in that place because it was the heart of the civilized city of London.

The baboon creature seized the woman! Ecko could discern her struggling in his grasp. She was silent—mysteriously silent.

Running, ape-like, out to the roadway where a

closed two-seater waited, the attacker, whom Ecko saw now to be a curiously deformed man dressed in black, lifted his victim, who had ceased to struggle, into the car, leapt in behind her, and in a trice was driving away in the direction of Buckingham Palace!

Ecko reached the scene of the outrage half a minute too late. For a moment his keen brain was at a loss. There was no pedestrian, no policeman usefully near. A genius for swift decision was his; the gymnasiums of Japan teach it even more effectively than those of the West.

He set out in pursuit, running easily and almost silently; and, as he ran, he considered what his next move must be.

Even if he should meet a policeman, the process of explaining to the representative of the law what had taken place would necessitate a fatal delay. The car would escape, and he had been unable to see its number. Already it was outdistancing him. Unoccupied taxicabs going in the opposite direction Ecko rejected, as he had rejected the idea of accosting a policeman, and for the same reason.

He must find a cab bound westward and board it without a stoppage, making the man understand the urgency of the matter; no easy thing for Ecko to do, as he fully realized. Once provided with a means of continuing the pursuit, doubtless some opportunity to act would present itself later.

The receding car was now racing around the bend by the Memorial and Ecko was rapidly losing ground. He was running in the roadway and had ignored the curiosity of one or two people whom he had passed. Now,

overtaking him, he heard what sounded like a taxicab. Continuing to run, he glanced back over his shoulder. Yes, a taxi, the flag up, was approaching, and, as Ecko looked around, the man raised his hand enquiringly.

"Yes, t'ank you," said the Japanese, a little breathlessly. "Don't stop, please. Very important. If all right, much money."

He was on the footboard now, bending down close to the astonished driver.

"You see car? Look! Darka blue—look! Go by statue!"

The taxi driver peered ahead curiously, then:

"Yes," he said, "I see her."

"You try keep in sight until I say what to do. You understand?"

The driver looked into the yellow face of his extraordinary fare. It was immobile, mask-like; only the intelligent eyes revealed the excitement which consumed Ecko. Taxi drivers are considerable psychologists, and this one was immediately convinced. He nodded his head briskly.

"Right ho!" he replied. "Be careful how you get in."

Ecko rested his hand upon the man's shoulder for a moment, and:

"T'ank you," he said. "Good pay."

With as little effort as it would have cost an acrobat, he swung back along the footboard and entered the cab.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE GLOBE OF POWER

"I ARRANGED that we should all meet here for supper to-night," said Sir Provost Hope, "for a very particular reason. I had not anticipated the pleasure of the announcement which you had to make to me, Carey." He glanced at the latter. "But nothing has pleased me better for many years than this understanding between you two."

Jasmine looked swiftly aside at Muir Torrington, who was smiling with a sort of grim geniality; and for all that self-control upon which she prided herself she could not check a sudden heightening of colour, which lent a new beauty to her charming face.

"Those obstacles," Sir Provost continued, "which at one time threatened to come between you have at last been cleared away. Their origin is the thing which we meet to-night to discuss. All of us are concerned. I have to-day received definite instructions"—he paused for a moment, meeting the enquiring glance of Torrington, but almost immediately went on—"to place you in possession of the full facts, all three of you. This, for your protection, and also for another purpose."

Jasmine and Carey seated themselves upon a settee as Sir Provost crossed the dimly lighted library and unlocked an oak bureau. Muir Torrington, feet widely

apart, stood before the fireplace watching him. Sir Provost returned to his chair by the table, carrying a bulky manuscript bound in a loose wrapper. Re-seating himself, he adjusted his glasses, looked for a moment from face to face, and then:

"What I have to say," he began, "is extraordinarily difficult of comprehension by any one unfamiliar with a certain line of study pursued by myself for many years. Here and now I bind you all to secrecy. The information is for your ears alone. Indeed, by the outside world I should be judged a madman if I were known to subscribe to such beliefs as are necessary to an understanding of these matters."

He tapped the manuscript with his fingers.

"All of us here, however, have had substantial evidence of the powers possessed by the writer of this book —probably the most extraordinary work which has seen the light during this present civilization. It was written by the man we know as Trepniak."

"Ah!" Torrington muttered, and began to move restlessly from foot to foot.

Jasmine glanced quickly at Carey, who squeezed her hand in silent reassurance.

"You," Sir Provost continued, turning to him, "informed me this evening that Inspector Whiteleaf, who is officially in charge of the case, has succeeded in tracing the source of a part, at least, of Trepniak's seemingly inexhaustible funds. This is a place near the Russian frontier of Persia and within easy access of the Caspian Sea. I must compliment Scotland Yard very highly. In a comparatively short time they have gathered evidence which I myself should have judged to be un-

obtainable by the means at their disposal. Their information, so far as it goes, is accurate, and the exact spot for which they are seeking is an abandoned monastery five miles from Meshed, in Khorassan.

"I say without hesitation that the present financial chaos of the world is due, in no small part, to the work which for some years past has been carried on in this monastery. In brief, synthetic gold and silver are manufactured there at little more than the cost of the labour involved."

Torrington whistled softly, thrust his hands in his pockets, and began to walk up and down. Jasmine and Carey remained silent.

"This," Sir Provost continued, "amounts to successful defiance of the higher law; in other words, the world is not yet ready for synthetic gold and silver. The existing financial system would be utterly destroyed if the process in operation at Meshed should ever be made public. It will not be made public, however. Transmutation has been performed with varying success many times in the past, but the secret has died with each of its several discoverers—because the day had not come for the world to know.

"That day draws very near us now, however, when a new standard will be set up and the word 'gold' will lose its magic."

"By Gad!' cried Torrington excitedly, "the diamond—the diamond! It's a *synthetic* diamond!"

His sudden outburst had startled everybody; but:

"You are wrong," Sir Provost replied quietly, "it is not a synthetic diamond, it is a natural diamond artificially enlarged."

"What!" Carey exclaimed. "I never heard of such a thing!"

"Doubtless," Sir Provost said, turning slightly in his direction. "You are about to hear a number of other things which will be equally new to you."

Carey was silent, and:

"One for you, my lad!" cried Torrington. "An artificially enlarged diamond! Gad! That's wonderful."

"Very wonderful," Sir Provost agreed. "Trepniak, I understand, has been at work for some years endeavouring to perfect this process. As in the case of transmutation, it is not new, nor has it now been performed for the first time in history. For instance, Cagliostro performed it, although modern historians do not credit the fact. He was equally successful with emeralds and rubies, and it is upon Cagliostro's formula that Trepniak has been working—hitherto, with poor success."

"It's miraculous!" Torrington exclaimed, a note almost of reverence in his voice. "The hand of Providence is unmistakable throughout. But the cost of such experiments must have been staggering if diamonds of any size were used."

"I have reason to suppose," Sir Provost replied, "that some, at least, of the diamonds employed in these ravenously expensive experiments were stolen."

Carey looked up with a start.

"I was right! 'Grey Face' was responsible for the Hatton Garden robbery?"

"Probably," was the answer, "and for many another which has not come in the way of Scotland Yard. You see, his facilities were enormous. Few human minds

could hide their secrets from him. The truth buried in a man's brain—the truth about himself, his motives, his private life—is rarely known even to his most intimate friends. It is a mystery which he takes with him to the grave. For Trepniak, there are few brains in the world which are not open books. I hope and believe that we four gathered here in this room, to-night at least, are immune from that searching ray which he has the power to direct upon the brain of any human being who interests him."

Jasmine's hand groped for and found that of Carey, and unknown to herself, she clutched it tightly.

"In the past," the speaker went on, "we may all have suffered this form of examination. I should not dare to say that I have not suffered it myself, or that your brain, Torrington, has not lain upon the dissecting table of this master psychologist. Possessing this power, a power which no man is entitled to wield, he could laugh at strong rooms and mock at the law. Take your own case, Carey." He turned in the latter's direction. "Your secret report, intended for the eye of the Commissioner alone, was delivered, not to Scotland Yard, but to——"

"Trepniak's house in Park Lane!" Torrington shouted excitedly. "Of course it was! Don't you see, Carey?"

Carey nodded slowly and:

"I begin to see many things," he replied.

"The papers entrusted to Lord Brankforth," Sir Provost continued, "the despatch which Ewart Stephens was bringing to Downing Street, the diamonds which some man, whose name I forget, was on his way

to deliver to a firm in Hatton Garden: these things were diverted in just the same way, and ultimately reached the same place."

Following a brief silence of stupefaction:

"It is perfectly clear to me," Torrington cried, "that this all points to some higher development of hypnotism. So much granted, I can see that the victims in the power of the hypnotist would forget their actions as he willed them to do. But one thing I cannot see. How did he hypnotize a man walking along the street? How did he hypnotize a man on a cross-Channel steamer? And lastly, how the devil—excuse me, Miss Hope!—but how the dickens did he hypnotize Carey, here, seated at his own table in his own room?"

Sir Provost smiled slightly at Torrington's violence.

"Your questions strike near to the heart of the matter," he replied quietly. "He was assisted by a device which belongs to a troubled future, to a future when civilization is apparently doomed to destroy itself. In short, he accomplished these things by means of what may be briefly described as a *hypnotizing machine*.

"The secret of this system, which no man has employed for three thousand years, belonged to a certain branch of a world-wide society or fraternity to whom few of the forces of Nature are unknown. He himself had been a member of this brotherhood, had risen high by virtue of his brilliant intellect; and then, grasping at this instrument of supreme power, he disappeared, believing that its possession protected him from just retribution."

He paused for a moment, but no one interrupted his strange story, and he went on:

"There is an Egyptian ritual of which it has been written—I quote from memory—that 'to read two pages enables you to enchant the heavens, the earth, the abyss, the mountains and the sea; you shall know what the birds of the sky and the crawling things are saying. And when the second page is read, if you are in the world of ghosts, you will grow again in the shape you were on earth.'

"Whilst the instrument of power which Trepniak had stolen did not endow him quite so richly, nevertheless it certainly enabled him to see what was hidden from the human eye, to know what was locked in any man's brain; to control, if not the heavens and the earth, at any rate the movements of his fellow men, and this without their knowledge. I would add that Trepniak's powers do not belong to the realm of 'magic.' Indeed, magic is merely a term which has been given to premature discoveries of the past. The miracle of yesterday is the scientific fact of to-day, and on some distant to-morrow every man will be vested with powers at least as great as those possessed by the Egyptian priests with whom Moses contended."

"But I still don't understand," said Jasmine, in a very hushed voice, "how he does these things; how people come under his influence, I mean."

"I can never hope to make you understand in detail," her father replied, "but the general principle can be illustrated by means of a magnet and a number of needles. His magnet is a gigantic beryl, a natural phenomenon such as has not occurred for thousands of years, and which possesses active properties of a kind becoming familiar to modern science. Objects placed in contact

with this beryl, under certain conditions, remain for a long time afterward *en rapport* with it. Your little ebony figure, Carey, was one such object. Thus it is only necessary for Trepniak to cause some trinket to be placed amongst the possessions of any one whom he considers of interest, and that person literally becomes his slave, whom he can call up at any hour of the day or night, provided the selected object remain within reach of the subject's vision. Distance is no barrier; and such points of contact are probably spread throughout the world; are to be found on the desks of a hundred diplomats, in the sanctums of the kings of finance. Many a minister unwittingly has accepted one with his portfolio of office. Consider—I ask you—consider the magnitude of this man's power." Throughout a long minute only the ticking of the library clock might be heard; then:

"How did this amazing information come into your possession, sir?" Carey asked; "and" —he pointed— "how did you obtain the manuscript, there, which you say was written by Trepniak?"

Sir Provost, running his fingers through his thick grey hair, turned slowly to the speaker.

"There are three wise men in the world to-day," he replied, "as there were when the Founder of Christianity was born. The youngest of these, who, despite his youth, could recompose from memory, if he wished, the lost books of Euclid, or could tell you when the Sphinx was carved and for what purpose, recently left it in my care."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

MR. MICHAEL REMEMBERS

"SEE here," said Teak, spreading his feet widely apart as though the floor of the cellar were the deck of a rolling ship, "I'll put it up to you another way. You don't trust me because I stiffed you; I was the party that laid you out. Good enough. I understand that. I should feel the same way myself. But, on the other hand, you never did trust me. Now I can mention two things which ought to make it look different. First thing"—he raised a stubby forefinger—"I did the same office for Mr. Krauss not so long ago, and I may as well mention that this little private suite, with chain, etc., was designed for his special use."

"What!" Michael exclaimed, watching the speaker contemptuously, "Krauss has been confined here—that fiend who came to torture me?"

"I said so," was the stolid reply. "He didn't stay as long as you, but then, he was more reasonable. Don't hold me responsible for his savagery. You passed your word not to set about *me*, and I unlocked the chain. I couldn't do more. You only have to pass your word to the old man to keep quiet, and the door will be unlocked as well."

"I decline to do so."

"I've heard you say it before. Listen, then—

there's a second point. You have been working in the dark for years."

"Yes," Michael murmured, that strange look of vagueness creeping into his eyes, "in the dark. I am in the dark."

"You don't know what it's all about," Teak continued, "any more than I do. You are a man of tip-top education, that's plain—I know it. You are useful in the laboratory here, and the furnace work was just A B C."

The cloud disappeared from Michael's eyes; it was as though a veil had been raised. He leapt back, eager, imperious, into the present, and:

"Are those experiments still being carried on?" he asked.

"No." Teak shook his head stolidly. "Since the night the crucible burst there have been no furnace-room watches. Listen"—he extended his hand, pointing. "You had me wrong from the start. In Moscow I tried to get next to you but you froze me stiff; in Paris the same. Yet, out of all this crew, we are the only two in the same boat."

Michael stared at the speaker inflexibly, and:

"Perhaps I have misunderstood you," he said. "Perhaps I misunderstand you now. What do you mean? Are you disloyal to the man who employs you? If so, for what reason? Are you a spy?"

Teak cleared his throat noisily. The uncompromising frankness of Mr. Michael was an obstacle which he lacked the wit to surmount. His glance hardened and he squared his jaw.

"You make things kind of awkward," he said. "To

talk to you isn't like dipping in a honey pot. Why ask damn silly questions! Are *you* a spy?"

Michael remained seated on the side of the bed, but his eyes blazed, and his delicate nostrils became slightly distended. He did not speak, however.

"You are not," Teak continued, watching him closely. "You have worked squarely at the job you were paid for and I have done the same. But if you feel happy about the treatment that's been handed out to you, then you're even a queerer brand of goods than you seem to be. I'll go a bit farther. I signed on here as a sort of bodyguard for the old man. How you started I don't know and I don't care. But when the old man gave me the order 'stiff him,' I stiffed you. You asked for it. I suppose you think that I have known all along what was in those crucibles? I suppose you think I know now what you had with you when you tried to make a getaway? You're wrong. I know it's a big game and I know it's crooked. But I don't know any more. Your angle I can't get. You're up against the old man and you're up against me. Yet I've tried to play the game with you as far as I dare go. But I'm here now to go one better at my own risk."

Michael's expression had changed slightly, and now:

"What do you want of me?" he asked. "You are a ruffian; why should I trust you?"

Teak's weather-beaten face hardened again.

"Don't make love to me," he growled; "I'm not used to it."

"Why should I trust you?" Michael repeated. "My God! If I had known!" He raised his clenched fists to his head. "I have been working for a gang of criminals.

You are one of them. I do not compromise with criminals. This outrage"—he swept his hand around, indicating his narrow quarters—"absolves me from every obligation. I have promised not to resort to violence. But if I can escape, I shall immediately place all the facts before the proper authorities!"

Teak nodded grimly. He regarded himself as something of a reformed character and within certain limitations his overtures to Michael had been sincere enough. He turned, and walked out of the cellar, locking the door behind him.

* * *

Michael relapsed into that state of apathy in which the greater part of his life was spent. Flashes of energy he had, nervous, mental, and physical, during which he was possessed by a fierce pride, a pride of race, a sense of superiority which, after all, was unaccountable, since he was a nonentity who did not even know his real name. It was because of this, because he could not define his place in the world, that he wavered so much in his attitude toward these men which whom, latterly, he had become associated.

He had been almost starving when Fate had thrown him into the path of Doctor Weissler in Moscow. And in the employment which the doctor offered there had seemed to be nothing dishonourable. It was an easy life, he supposed, as life went for those compelled to work; but when these ideas came to him, bringing with them strange, elusive shadows of something which had been before that meeting with Doctor Weissler, the vacant expression crept over Michael's face. He

drifted away into some dream-world where none might follow him, save that vulgarity or disrespect had power instantly to call him back, and to set flaming in his eyes an angry beacon; to lend to the curve of his nostrils, the poise of his head, something that was imperious, intolerant.

Always, day and night, whilst conscientiously he performed the task allotted to him, or whilst in his modest apartment he wearily counted the unoccupied hours—always he found his thoughts reverting to that dim past which defied him. There was glory in it, and pride, joy, catastrophe, and sorrow. It was vivid, widely different from the life which he lived now; so vivid, so bright, that sometimes, when it came to him in dreams, he awakened, crying a name, thinking he had regained the past. But in the moment of awakening the curtain always descended again, so that he could not even remember the name which he had cried, and could recall no incident of the vivid dream which had awakened him.

It was a woman's name, he thought, but his waking efforts to recover it were invariably fruitless. A taunting word would stir up something fierce and scornful in him, and at such moments the past drew very near to the present: the veil grew very thin.

Moscow had been one grey, dull monotony. Nothing in the city had struck any familiar chord; but in Paris, over and over again, he had stood suddenly still before a monument, a café, a theatre, only to pass on a moment later, wondering what had prompted his delay. Twice people had spoken to him: one, a fashionable Frenchman, and the other a poorly dressed woman

who looked like a Russian. The man, finding no recognition in Michael's eyes, had turned, piqued, and walked away. The woman had looked frightened, mumbled something, and had stood looking after him as he passed on.

In London there had been no incident of this kind, no sudden stoppages before public buildings. Between his suburban rooms and the Limehouse factory he had passed daily with the regularity of an automaton, sunken in that dull apathy, performing his tasks conscientiously, but indifferent to the ultimate purpose of the work upon which he was engaged. The nature of the experiments in the furnace-room, which had so intrigued Teak, had not aroused the slightest interest in Michael, the more cultured man. Nothing interested him except that injustice, insult, could awaken strange fires in him, whilst the petty things of life he simply did not understand.

The bursting of the crucible in the furnace-room had all but effected, in its result, that which his weary mental efforts had failed to accomplish in years. When he had taken the necessary precautions to prevent an outbreak of fire and had found amid the steaming ashes that incredible stone, a thought had leapt to his mind which was a pain and a reproach.

Doctor Weissler's experiments were directed to the making of synthetic diamonds!

As the truth of his conjecture dawned upon his mind the other, slumbering, man awoke, contemplating those thousands to whom the commercializing of this process must bring ruin. Doubting, questioning, generously open to believe the best, but reluctantly compelled to assume the worst, he had matured a plan.

His watch ended at eight o'clock; and, waiting until Teak came into the office above, he had set out, taking the diamond with him, had had his bath at his rooms, had changed, and had proceeded to a jeweller's in Bond Street, of which he chanced to know the name. One plain object he held in view: that which he conceived to be his duty, not to his employer, but to himself and to the world. He wished to know if this gigantic brilliant, the like of which he had never seen, were a genuine diamond.

He had learned that it was so before the lapidary had spoken. The man's startled expression betrayed the truth, and a very brief conversation had satisfied Michael that his suspicions were well based. Returning along Burlington Arcade he had suddenly become aware of the figure of Teak, not thirty paces in his rear. His brain worked very slowly, very painfully. He had not yet determined upon his proper course of action. He needed time; ideas came to him so slowly, except for those brilliant flashes.

Such an inspiration had come, as, glancing back over his shoulder, he almost collided with two men on the point of parting, indeed just shaking hands immediately in front of him.

"Good-bye, Torrington," he heard. "I will look you up directly I return to town."

"You will find me in the 'phone book," said the other. "If ever you want to swop your job of ship's surgeon for a Mayfair practice, I'm your bird!"

"Good enough. Are you under T for Torrington or M for Muir?"

"T for Torrington. Good-bye, old man."

One swift glance Michael had taken at the face of the last speaker and had determined upon his course. Whether he had done well or ill, he could not know. At least, the step which he had taken had opened his eyes to the true character of his employer and his associates. He might have gone on doubting; doubt now was impossible. He was associated with a group of criminals, had been associated with them since the earliest times he could remember; for beyond those days of hunger in Moscow his memory was impotent to penetrate.

It was a discovery which plunged him into black depths of despair. This humiliation was almost more than he could support. The physical violence he had suffered counted for little in comparison. Dimly, he divined that he must have known worse things in the way of bodily suffering.

So, sometimes, his spirit firing up volcanically, distant memories drew tauntingly near; but for many dull hours out of every twenty-four he was lost in that apathetic state which was only half-life.

These moods were growing more frequent and of longer duration. The visits of Teak to attend to his needs alone had broken the monotony of his imprisonment, save for that one maniacal intrusion of Krauss. Dully, he distrusted the American, which was no more than natural since Teak had been instrumental in confining him here. Yet, he experienced no fear of the future. He apprehended no violence to come. On the whole, he was pathetically passive. A sort of numbness would steal over his brain, and for hours he would sit contemplating some remote, undefinable sorrow.

* * *

Except for rumbling of distant traffic no sound penetrated to his cellar from the outer world until an hour, many hours—he could not judge—after Teak's departure, a sudden, piercing outcry reached his ears.

It awakened his brain electrically, and he leapt up as one galvanized, standing alert, fists clenched, listening intently. Words followed; broken, frightened words in a woman's voice, interrupted by a guttural babble which seemed to send a chill of horror through every nerve in his body.

Krauss, the ape-man, was somewhere in the building!

Again he heard that piteous woman voice, and the expression upon his face changed magically. A new light came into the widely opened eyes. It was as though the man known as Mr. Michael had melted from existence and another, a stronger, a finer man had taken his place. He uttered a great cry, wild, triumphant. He viewed his prison no longer with apathy, but critically, searchingly, as one set upon escape.

No daylight ever penetrated. He was dependent upon an electric lamp hanging from the ceiling. The inner room was similarly illuminated. One barred window there was, high in a plastered wall, and boarded up outside. No ray of light ever crept through the boards and no sound came from the place outside—a sort of well opening in a paved yard.

Again the appealing, pitiful voice reached his ears; and Mr. Michael acted.

A new and unsuspected physical strength came to him. He raised the heavy deal table upon which his meals were served and placed it beneath the boarded window. Upon it he erected his bed, as a ladder, and,

mounting, began closely to examine the iron bars and the boarding.

The bars were rusty but strong: given time he might have displaced them. The boards defied him. (Apathetically, he had considered them before.) But, as he stood there, keenly testing every possibility, there came a loud rapping from outside!

"Yes," he said, hoarsely. "Who is there?"

"Listen, please," a soft Oriental voice replied. "I t'ink, take somet'ing—and push the wood—to help. If—a little way apart, I t'ink, can do. Perhaps. Quickly, please."

The suggestion was not too intelligible, but Michael, his wits now keenly alive, appreciated the speaker's point. He dropped down upon the table, thence to the floor, and looked about him.

A massive and dilapidated office chair, which, with the table and the bed, made up practically all the furniture of the room, promised to suit his purpose. He set it on the table, and then raised it until it rested on top of the bed. Displaying great agility, he mounted. Wedging the two front legs between an iron bar and the outer woodwork, he used the chair as a lever, leaning perilously backward so as to employ all his weight.

The woodwork creaked—creaked again. He became aware of helpful effort from outside. Then, with a tearing sound, one heavy plank broke away.

"Good! Good!" said the soft voice. "Now, please, the next one."

Michael moved his lever; and the second board was wrenched from its position. With its displacement, his unknown ally became visible in the yellow rays of the

electric lamp—a stocky little Japanese, bright-eyed and alert, but immobile as an image.

"The other way, please, now," he directed, gently.

Michael nodded, changed position upon his unsteady perch, and, turning the chair around, aided the Japanese to remove the remaining two boards.

A frenzied shriek sounded from somewhere in the building—and Michael gnashed his teeth so that the sound was audible to Ecko in the well outside the window. But:

"Bars now," he said. "Easy to do. This way, like I show you."

And, as Michael set to work with the strength and purpose of a cool madman, he observed a deep cut above the right eye of the Japanese from which blood was streaming down his immobile face.

CHAPTER XXXIX

"I UNDERSTAND"

MADAME SABINOV awakened to a horror surpassing any she had known. Uncouth caresses touched her. Repulsive kisses were being pressed upon her hands, her arms. Pain-racked and nauseated, she opened her eyes, to find that she lay upon a couch in a room part laboratory and part office. Crouching upon the floor, gloating over her, hideously, animally, was a hirsute, wild-eyed creature, whom in that first fearful glance she did not believe to be human.

She uttered a piercing cry, her mind, body, and soul shrinking from loathsome contact. She leapt up, swayed, staggered—and fell back again upon the couch. After-effects of the drug robbed her of strength; and now, seeking to grasp her hands, her hideous companion, in a guttural voice shaken with emotion, began to speak.

Madame Sabinov succeeded in sitting upright, drawing back—farther back—and watching the quivering, hairy face with horror-bright eyes.

"Please understand—oh! please understand," Krauss began, and speech seemed to demand great physical and mental effort; his accent and intonation alike were barbarous. "You are so beautiful, you make me mad. But see!"—he knelt like a great ape at her feet; "I would

not harm you; I will not even touch you. I am your slave. You are so beautiful!"

His glance roamed over her hungrily.

"I have watched, I have watched you for so long. When you did not know I was watching. When you were with *him* I was watching. I have torn my own flesh, I have beaten myself unconscious, when I have known he was with you. Hundreds, hundreds, and more than hundreds of times, I have been where I could see the light at your window until morning."

He swayed to and fro, gesticulating uncouthly with hairy hands. She watched him, fighting for reason, for sanity; knowing that if ever she needed her wits she needed them now.

"When I tell you all of it you can perhaps forgive," he went on in that hoarse animal tone which characterized his speech. "If I am mad, it is you and not myself that should be blamed. Do not fear me—do not fear me—do not think of my ugliness. Think of my power; of what I can do for you. I will give you, not a house and servants, but gold enough to buy the world! I will take you to the place where it is made, and all that is made shall be yours. Those foolish gifts were nothing: the poor little jewels he gave you. If from me you ask a room built of pearls—you shall have it. The paths you walk I will pave with diamonds. No woman in all the world has been as you will be. He was not fit to have you, to hold you. I understand the power, the demands, of beauty. Let me be your slave, let me only see you sometimes—touch your hands—and I will make you a goddess. Immortal: never to die!"

Sanity, understanding, began now to return to the

woman who listened. As the torrent of words was poured forth she regained command of herself. Her first frightful impression left her, giving place to a second, scarcely less horrible, but which she preferred to entertain, since at least it classified this shaggy creature in whose power she found herself. He was some protégé of Trepniak's. This was the shadow of which long since she had become aware.

He was a madman. His demeanour, his words, proved it. Therefore, whilst terrifying, he was pitiable; and if she could but restrain him from violence, her wit yet might conquer.

And now, whilst the demented but formidable creature babbled on, Madame Sabinov became aware of something which intuitively she knew to mean hope of rescue; not possibility of new peril, but the coming of a friend.

A window almost directly before her, but invisible to the ape-man who crouched at her feet, was being opened, slowly and nearly silently!

She thought that it was Trepniak who had traced her, and she sought to render her face expressionless in order that she might not betray her hopes and fears to the deformed creature, whose small sunken eyes were fixed upon her hungrily. At last the window became fully raised—and a little Japanese swung himself over the ledge. Madame's surprise betrayed her into a start.

At the moment that the Japanese dropped upon the floor Krauss sprang up, whirled around—and instantly the two were locked in deadly conflict!

Not doubting the issue, not daring to watch, Madame

Sabinov, clenching her hands tightly, stood up and ran to the door.

It was locked, and the key was missing.

She turned, leaning back against it. The fight was not over yet. Krauss was uttering horrible growls like those of an enraged animal; but Ecko fought silently and skilfully, striking no blows, but cunningly dodging those of his opponent. Then, suddenly, he secured a hold, and Krauss fell with a crash which shook the room, Ecko on top of him.

It was well done, and must have meant victory for the Japanese in the case of any normal man. But Krauss, who seemingly possessed superhuman strength, instant by instant fought against the strangle-hold, great veins starting out on his ape-like forehead, whilst Ecko's face grew gray with effort.

Krauss's breath whistled audibly through his nostrils. There came a sharp, snapping sound. He turned completely over—and, his left arm hanging useless from the shoulder, he raised himself upright one second ahead of the Japanese and heavily kicked the latter upon the head.

The impact of a thick-soled boot upon the skull was sickeningly audible.

Ecko went down like a log; and Krauss, his eyes blood-shot, his face quivering, rushed to the door, fumbled for a key, and found it He unlocked the door, and with his one serviceable hand dragged Ecko out into the corridor beyond.

He returned, closing the door.

One arm hanging limply beside him, he stood staring across at Madame Sabinov. His eyes, in which a red-

dish hue had appeared, resembled the eyes of a dangerous wild animal.

* * *

Ecko was recalled from shadowy places to painful consciousness by the appealing cry of a woman. He found himself in darkness, his head throbbing like a drum and his face bathed in blood. For a few moments he lay still, seeking a clue to his plight; and at last it came: he remembered.

Faint light shone under the door outside which he lay, and a torrent of guttural language, broken up by pitiful, breathless appeals, gave strength to his will to act.

Painfully, weakly, he got upon his feet, one hand outstretched to the wall to steady himself. So he stood for a while, and knew, because of the shaking of his limbs and sense of swimming in his head, that now he was no match for the hairy man, but at all costs must obtain assistance, and speedily.

Facts began to come back to him. The taxi driver, finally entering into the spirit of the chase—but from whom, since he could not leave his cab, Ecko had been compelled to part at the corner of Pennyfields—had undertaken to find a policeman. At this point it had become clear that the destination of the two-seater could only be a big warehouse at the end of the lane.

Ecko groped his way blindly along the passage. With trembling fingers he struck a match, discovered an uncarpeted stair, and staggered down to the door at the bottom. He opened it—and found himself in a little well-like yard on the opposite side of the building from that into which the car had been driven.

Here it was, as he stood looking about him from right to left, that he heard a great cry, and a sudden turmoil as of the hasty moving of furniture.

Fresh air acting as a restorative, he wiped the blood from his eyes, and presently discovered a sunken window from beyond which the cry seemed to have come. He stood for a moment again, listening, but could hear no sound of voices in the lane. Therefore, since nothing was to be gained by going out, he determined to investigate the cause of this strange outcry. Instinct told him that he might find an ally.

* * *

Madame Sabinov looked up into the grinning, animal face. Reason had fled from those deep-set eyes. No possible appeal could reach her persecutor, wholly dehumanized, transformed into a brute thing by the attack of the mysterious but courageous Japanese, whose gallant fight had led, she supposed, to his death.

Rapidly her strength was ebbing in the unequal contest.

"You are for *me!*" Krauss muttered thickly. "He would have let you die. But I will keep you beautiful always."

Three times, by trickery, she had escaped from the clutch of that one sound arm, and three times had all but reached the door, which Krauss had failed to relock. But always he had foiled her, growing more dangerous with each attempted escape. And, now, his arm was about her like a band of steel.

She pressed her hands against the hideous hairy face, and twisted her head aside, for she knew that the touch

of those animal lips upon hers would be the end. This she could not suffer and retain her senses.

Inch by inch, relentlessly, he conquered. His blue-black beard touched her cheek, and resistance grew ever less. She tore at his face with her nails. Except that he bared a row of gleaming yellow teeth, Krauss gave no evidence of the pain which he must have suffered.

Now she could feel his hot breath upon her forehead. It nauseated her. Her fighting powers were almost exhausted. A name rose like a sigh to her quivering lips.

"*Michael!*" she whispered.

As if in magical response, the door was thrown open. Michael hurled himself into the room, Ecko close behind him. The whisper died. Krauss's gross lips touched those of the swooning woman, and she became as a dead thing in his embrace.

Michael sprang across, stooped, grasped the hairy throat with both hands, and, planting a knee in Krauss's spine, he jerked the latter back from his victim. Krauss reeled, received a furious blow behind his left ear, and crashed to the floor.

"My love!"

Michael dropped upon his knees beside the insensible woman, held her in his arms, and looked into her face with incredulous, adoring eyes. In his gaze were wonder, rapture, and a great, unnameable fear. He began to kiss her pale lips and to whisper her name. Ecko, glancing at the hunched-up figure of Krauss, unnoticed, stepped back into the corridor.

"Poppæa!" Michael whispered, "my love, my love, speak to me!"

And now his words, his kisses, recalled her. Droop-

ing lids quivered, then suddenly were raised; and she stared, wide-eyed, into the face so near her own. For fully five seconds there was absolute silence. Then, a slow smile like that of a frightened child who awakes to find her mother bending over her stirred the pale lips, and:

"I have found you," she whispered. "I knew you would be waiting. Can you forgive me, my dear one?"

"Poppæa," Michael said huskily, "try to understand. You are safe—you are safe in my arms. Thank God I have found you again."

The smile left her lips: remembrance came. She looked about her, her glance now horror-laden. But he held her fast, pressing his cheek to hers.

"You are safe," he murmured, "you are safe, my love."

But she struggled upright, pushing him gently away, and looking at him, the pupils of her eyes blackly dilated.

"*Michael!*"

She uttered the name as a stifled shriek. Convulsively she sprang back from him. But:

"My dearest," he said soothingly, and opened his arms—"I understand, I understand. You thought me dead, but I am alive. Only my mind was dead; my memory left me—after my escape from the Red Army. It has returned. Your dear voice awakened me. I know that I am Michael Sabinov, and I know, and thank God, that you are my wife—my love."

But she did not move. She began to breathe quickly, standing, hands clenched and her arms held rigidly to her sides. Then:

"God!" she whispered. "It is true! You have come

back to me, and now—I am not fit for your love. No!" Her voice rose emotionally: "Don't touch me! I never doubted you were dead—I never doubted it—and the loss of you drove me mad, cruelly, wickedly mad. *Do* you understand?" Her eyes stared at him feverishly. "*Can* you understand what I have done in my sorrow and loneliness? All that I was, before, I have become again—and worse. What had I to cling to?"

Her face seemed to grow lined and haggard, tears streamed down her cheeks.

"I have dragged your name in the gutter," she sobbed. "I have defied heaven. I have flaunted my defiance—because my heart was broken."

Yet, wondrously, nothing but yearning compassion could be read in Count Michael's face. His arms remained outstretched.

"My love," he said, "I understand."

Unable to believe, watching him, watching him almost frenziedly, extending quivering hands and drawing them back again, re-clenching them, she began to creep nearer, doubting, wondering, seeming to fear a rebuff that would mean death. But at last comprehending the miracle of this man's great love, with a low sobbing cry of utter joy she threw herself into the haven of his arms. . . .

The crack of a pistol sounded, and Michael staggered, clutching at his shoulder.

Krauss had fired from the floor, and now getting upon his knees, he raised the pistol to fire a second time. But Ecko was too quick for him. Like a swift shadow he entered the room, kicking the weapon from its owner's hand.

Michael, grown suddenly pale, dropped back upon the couch, and, Ecko's attention being thus diverted, Krauss, uttering an indescribable snarling sound, got upon his feet and ran out.

Madame Sabinov was transfigured. Once she glanced at the pale face of the wounded man, then, stooping, she snatched up the pistol and ran out into the corridor. Again and again she fired after the retreating figure. Coolly, purposefully, she followed to the head of the stairs, and only ceased firing when the magazine was empty. A door banged, and a sudden outcry arose in the street.

CHAPTER XL

THE BOOK OF TREPNIAK

SIR PROVOST glanced at the clock on the library mantelpiece.

"I must hurry," he said. "In little more than an hour it will be daylight." He turned to Jasmine: "Are you very tired?"

"Tired!" she exclaimed. "I was never more wide awake in my life! Of course, it's simply frightful, Daddy, almost more than one can believe." She looked half appealingly at Carey who sat beside her. "But I don't think I could ever sleep again until I knew it all."

"I am by way of agreeing with you," Muir Torrington declared. "I have already made notes of one or two points upon which I should like further information, but they are small compared with the big question which sticks out like a mountain in the ocean."

"What is this big question?" Sir Provost asked quietly.

"What is the big question!" Torrington cried: "The big question is, what kind of man succeeded in cramming into one lifetime a whole century of study?"

"One," Sir Provost replied, "who, at that period of life when the mental faculties begin to show signs of deterioration, discovered a means of preserving his own

unimpaired. Thus he was enabled to go on experimenting, and building upon his experience, with results of which we have seen something. Because he had apparently defied natural laws, he seems to have counted himself superior to them. This megalomania is understandable. He had achieved a greater conquest than any Alexander, any Napoleon. As these did before him, he employed his power to take what he wanted.

"But if the memoirs"—he tapped the manuscript—"are as accurate and sincere in this respect as in others which may be tested, his depredations have been confined to those who could well afford to suffer them, and the greater evils he has committed have been due to imperfect control of forces only partly understood, rather than to any wanton desire to inflict harm.

"No autobiographer with whom I am acquainted, not excluding Pepys, Benvenuto Cellini, and Casanova, has so nakedly displayed his soul as Trepniak has done in this amazing record. The thing which he contemplated was no less than domination of the world. It was impossible of achievement. The powers conferred by the Ancient Egyptian *Book of Thoth* are, fortunately, irrecoverable to-day, and if Madame Blavatsky ever possessed the *Book of Dzyan*, it is lost. But the publication of the *Book of Trepniak* came within the province of possibility; and this, had he accomplished it, would, I am prompted to say, have proved as destructive to the human race as a second Deluge. No other copy exists, however. This is not hypothetical; it is certain. The author is unaware of the fact that the MS. is no longer in his possession—and to-night it will be destroyed."

Sir Provost paused, looking around him, but as no one spoke:

"You are naturally curious," he continued, "to learn how it was obtained, and why it has been left with me. The facts serve to illustrate how an organization controlling forces which for many generations to come will remain unknown to the world strictly refrains from employing them.

"The manuscript was stolen from a safe in Trepniak's house by the most expert lock manipulator now living! —this, under instructions from his superiors in that fraternity of which both he and I are members. So, you see"—he smiled slightly—"there has been no Black Magic at work here. That great philosopher who recently called upon me, and to whom I have already referred, came here in a taxicab like any ordinary citizen, and is now, I believe, a first-class passenger on an outward bound P. & O. liner.

"Next, why was it left with me? The answer is perfectly simple. You, Jasmine"—he turned to his daughter—"and you, Carey, and you, too, Torrington, form, with myself and four others, the instruments chosen by that Craftsman of Destinies sometimes called Fate, for the destruction of this rebel against God. Several chapters"—he turned the pages over —"are sealed. These chapters deal with matters known to Trepniak, but which in my present state of knowledge may not be revealed to me. The unsealed parts of the book I have read, and some of the contents you already know. It is in your interests, however, that I should read further."

He adjusted his spectacles, and began to turn

over the leaves, their rustling alone disturbing the silence in the library. Muir Torrington was moving restlessly from foot to foot, and only by great effort restraining speech. But the sound of his movements was deadened by the thick rug upon which he stood.

"Now," said Sir Provost, looking up again, "by means of a giant beryl at present in his laboratory in Park Lane, Trepniak is enabled to control the movements of selected persons. This, again, is not magical. It is a scientific and logical development of hypnotism. But the device possesses a peculiar property beyond the power of the operator to control. I refer to the fact that the subject, on awakening from the trance induced by the hypnotist, retains in nearly every case a memory——"

"The grey face!" Jasmine whispered.

"As you say, the grey face," Sir Provost agreed. "The reason for this particular phantasm I shall presently explain, but I may say that in those ancient times when this device was last employed—by the High Priests of a religion which to-day is no more than a name—the image left upon the mind of the dreamer was that, not of a deathly grey face, but of a sublime and beneficent presence.

"In this way," he added, slowly and impressively, "many of the prophecies of ancient times were delivered to the subjects chosen to give them forth to the world. Thus, an inscription on the memorial stone before the breast of the Sphinx relates that Tehutimes IV, when hunting lions in the Valley of the Gazelles, rested there; and—I quote from memory—'it seemed to him as though this great god spoke to him

with his own mouth.' Actually it was the chief priest of Memphis who spoke to him, by means of the beryl now revolving night and day in Trepniak's house!

"In the Old Testament are constant references to an angel appearing before such and such a person. This same, or a similar, mighty implement of ancient government, more often than not was responsible, and the angelic image was that of the Master who dictated the message."

He ceased speaking, looking about him as if expecting an inquiry; and presently it came, from Carey.

"Whose image," the latter asked, "is responsible for the terrible face, like that of a man long dead, which I saw, or dreamed I saw?"

Sir Provost fixed his curious regard upon the inquirer, and:

"It is the image of the man operating the crystal to-day," he replied; "and because this mechanism cannot lie, it reveals him, not as he seems to the human eye, but as he really is."

"Whatever do you mean, Sir Provost?" Muir Torrington cried.

"I mean, that the Trepniak known to fashionable London is a phantom, a mirage. The real man is the man dimly remembered by those whom he has influenced. You are puzzled, but I will explain presently." He turned over several leaves of the manuscript. "I may touch on a second source of power, quite legitimately explored and effectively used, by the master mind with which we are dealing. This, again, is what I have termed a premature discovery,

and it amounts to a solution of the enigma of the Fourth Dimension."

He ran his fingers through his hair, and seemed to be searching for words in which to make his meaning clear; but:

"I have seen something of this in operation," Carey interrupted. "Unless we were all victims of an extraordinarily clever illusion, I was recently one of a party at his house who distinctly heard the King speak in Buckingham Palace, although months had elapsed since the words were spoken. Moreover, if Trepniak is to be believed, we heard music sung in a temple at Thebes during the reign of one of the early Pharaohs!"

"Good," said Sir Provost; "this assists my explanation. One can readily imagine that few secrets of the past could remain hidden from an investigator armed with such an amazing apparatus of the future. In this way, then, Trepniak learned the secret of transmutation, his intimate knowledge of chemistry enabling him practically to employ it. The method of enlarging precious stones he almost certainly acquired from Cagliostro—that extraordinary Italian adventurer, who, amongst other notable achievements, predicted the French Revolution. This point is particularly significant—I mean the association with Cagliostro—as you will see when I come to that part of the story which deals with the identity of Trepniak, and the means whereby he has been enabled to prolong his studies to this issue."

He glanced again at the clock, and:

"Some of us must be very tired," he said, "although you young people who dance all night are used to late

hours. You are being afforded a glimpse into the future, however. To-night, in a sense, the Fourth Dimension has ceased to exist for all of us, for we are dealing with things which belong to a generation unborn. Here in this room is forbidden knowledge great enough to devastate the world."

CHAPTER XLI

FORBIDDEN WISDOM

"WHAT should you guess," Sir Provost asked, glancing around the room from face to face, "to be Trepniak's age?"

His glance finally rested on the face of Torrington, into whose eyes an almost wild look of enlightenment had leapt; but Carey was the first to answer, and:

"It is very hard to judge," he said, "in the case of a man of his type, but I should say between thirty-five and forty."

"I think he is older," Jasmine declared; "not perhaps in his appearance, or his habits, but in his outlook."

"Ah!" Torrington exclaimed. "Woman's wisdom!"

"That is so." Sir Provost nodded his head. "But I await your opinion, Torrington."

"I hesitate to give it," Torrington replied. "You see, I have examined the man, and frankly, he puzzles me. You say thirty-five to forty, Carey? And you, Miss Hope?"

"I should guess him nearer fifty," she said.

"Ah!" Torrington repeated, and began to walk up and down excitedly. "But I rather fancy, Sir Provost" —turning to meet the other's glance—"that *you* know the facts?"

"I do," Sir Provost admitted. "Trepniak is between ninety-six and ninety-seven years of age."

"What!"

Carey almost jumped out of his seat. Jasmine's eyes became round mirrors of wonderment. But:

"I knew it!" Torrington shouted. "I knew it! Now I understand his skin, and now I understand Chapter Thirty-six of *Atomic Pathology*."

"*Atomic Pathology*," Sir Provost took him up, "was written when its author, Hadrian von Gühl, was over seventy. It is an elaboration of a series of lectures delivered at Leipzig during the latter part of 1898 and the beginning of 1899. It brought about a revolution in the treatment of lymphatics, as you know, Torrington, but its deeper significance has apparently been overlooked."

"It was overlooked by me," Torrington interrupted, "until I found Trepniak studying a work of Gühl's on the occasion of my first visit. This started a train of thought: I followed it up, re-reading *Atomic Pathology* with care. I had particularly in mind the extraordinary quality of the man's skin."

Sir Provost Hope raised his hand, checking the speaker.

"You were quite right, Torrington," he said; "very cleverly you were groping your way toward the truth. I don't doubt that in time you would have reached it. According to Trepniak's account"—he consulted the manuscript—"it was in 1902 that the system hinted at in Chapters Thirty-six to Forty-one of *Atomic Pathology* was developed by Gühl to a point at which he felt justified in experimenting upon human subjects.

"It is strange how Science constantly catches up with and outdistances superstition. All the modern blood-infusion theories are no more, of course, than adaptations of the methods ascribed to vampires in the Middle Ages, and Gühl's system of rejuvenation is based upon his discovery of the properties of a certain gland in the human body. An extraction from this gland, in the case of a young and healthy subject, produces no ill-effects in the person yielding it. The extraction of too large a quantity, however, may very readily prove fatal.

"This secretion Gühl incorporated with a certain proportion of blood drawn from the veins of the person to be rejuvenated; such was the base of his serum. There was a third constituent of purely mineral character, costly, and difficult to prepare. Upon this point I need say no more.

"Professor Gühl made his first experiment on a hospital patient of advanced years, and apparently marked for death. His laboratory assistant, a chemist named Weissler, induced a young member of his own family to submit to the slight operation necessary for the preparation of the serum; and the experiment was made. This in the spring of 1903."

"What was the result?" Torrington cried eagerly.

"The immediate death of the patient!" was the reply. "But Gühl was not dismayed. He recognized where he had gone wrong, and experimented again. This time he succeeded, within limitations. The subject was a man of the peasant class nearing eighty, and Gühl restored him to vigorous health in less than a week. Great secrecy was observed, and the patient,

of course, was kept under close observation. There were curious features in the case. First, the man's skin became blanched like that of an albino."

"Good God!" Torrington exclaimed.

"The hair also was colourless, as in leucosis; and thirdly, he developed the traits of a dangerous wild animal, finally having to be strapped to the bed to prevent his homicidal outbursts. Lastly, in the enjoyment of full physical vigour, he suddenly collapsed and died some three weeks after the operation had been performed.

"Gühl, however, was not beaten yet. He realized that the result of his treatment was not permanent; that the injections must be maintained at intervals to be determined; that the action upon the brain required further study; and lastly, a minor, but not unimportant point, that some method had yet to be found for preserving the colour of the hair.

"Toward the end of 1906 he completed a long series of laboratory experiments, and a subject for his third attempt was literally thrust upon him at this time by medium of a street accident which befell Weissler, his assistant.

"Loss of blood was so great that the man's life was despaired of. I may say that Weissler at this period was over seventy years of age. Gühl determined to test his new serum. He now for the first time practised that surgical piracy which, later, he regularly pursued. He was, of course, an accomplished hypnotist, and a student unconsciously supplied the base of the serum which was used to restore Weissler!

"The treatment proved successful. It was carried

out, this third experiment, with secrecy, at the Professor's private house. I shall not have time to give you details of the means adopted by Gühl to conceal the result. Suffice it to say that old Weissler disappeared. The reputation of the Professor was unchallengeable, and the rejuvenated man became a secret inmate of Gühl's house."

"Why secret?" asked Torrington.

"For a very good reason," Sir Provost replied. "I have said that the treatment was successful. This is correct. His hair became jet-black—indeed, more than humanly black, and so profuse as to render him grotesque in appearance. His shrunken body expanded but did not increase in height, whilst his arms, which were always long, grew longer! His intellect remained practically unimpaired, except for periodical homicidal outbursts, invariably directed against the Professor. The treatment was continued, numberless victims providing the basis of the serum. Weissler had acquired formidable physical strength, and the animal in his nature was strongly manifested. In short, except for his acquired knowledge, which remained, he had reverted to the primitive.

"This phenomenon led to further study; and, finally, Gühl grasped the explanation. Intense mental concentration was necessary at the time of the first injection if the balance of character were to be maintained. Otherwise, the stronger characteristics, which nearly always would be the lower and those normally suppressed, would gain ascendancy.

"Convinced that his knowledge of the process was now complete, the Professor, in the year 1912, sub-

mitted himself to his own treatment. He was, of course, a man of amazing personality and phenomenal virility. His other studies, the nature of which we have already considered, had reached a point in advance of any student of his generation. At the age of eighty-five the brain of Hadrian von Gühl remained the brain of an active genius; and this was the intellectual giant who, in the latter part of 1912, assisted by Weissler, his confidant and assistant in these experiments, attempted to check the processes of Nature in order that he might complete those studies which enthralled him, and in which—too late, if he should fail—he saw possibilities stretching out illimitably.

"In September, 1912, at his own home in Leipzig, Professor Gühl set his affairs in order, and then, so far as the world knew, went upon a journey to Russia from which he never returned.

"The subsequent outbreak of war served his purpose admirably, and he experienced little difficulty in beginning a new life. The disappearance of the aged Professor was less than a nine days' wonder in Germany. Other matters arose to claim public attention.

"During the next five or six years these two strange beings, Gühl and Weissler, travelled through the Far East and the Near East, in pursuit of those hidden secrets of Nature which are said to be discoverable there. Using various names, and sometimes even employing disguises, the Professor penetrated to the secret monasteries of Tibet. Here, or in China, he perfected that system which you, Carey, have seen actually in operation, of—shall I say?—'listening-in' to the past.

"It was apparently from Ibn Sina, commonly

known as Avicenna, of Bokhara, that he picked up the secret of transmutation. At any rate, it was in Meshed near the Russian frontier that he established his gold factory. On the interesting point of how it is conducted, and how the gold is transported and sold, I have, unfortunately, no information.

"Then, finally, in Egypt, Gühl achieved his master stroke. He grasped that instrument of terrifying power toward which for many years his studies had been tending. This accomplished, he seems to have proceeded to Moscow, and in Moscow experiments were commenced upon Cagliostro's formula for diamonds.

"And now you see we are back again to Cagliostro, who constantly crops up, as you must have observed —and for a very good reason. Gühl knew that some of the claims of this famous charlatan were based upon a phenomenal knowledge of Nature's laws.

"Throughout the year 1912—that is, immediately prior to his great experiment upon himself—the Professor seems to have been studying the works of Cagliostro—supposedly destroyed but actually preserved in Rome. How, at this time, he obtained access to them, I do not know, nor does he explain. The result, however, was very curious."

"Very curious!" Carey interrupted. "Now that my attention is drawn to the fact, I can see that Trepniak is a physical counterpart of Cagliostro."

"Trepniak!" Jasmine whispered.

Torrington strode across and rested his hand upon her shoulder.

"My dear girl," he said, "no doubt your father has his reasons for telling you these things, but I know

that it must be a shock to find that a man you have driven with, danced with, and dined with, is a horrible phenomenon who by all the laws of Nature should be dead and buried."

He returned again to his place upon the hearth, and Jasmine, who had grown very pale, once more clasped Carey's hand.

"You see, Jasmine," Sir Provost continued, "when Hadrian von Gühl ceased to exist, another man came into being. He used many names, but of these I only know two: one, the name formerly borne by his assistant, was Weissler, to which he added the title of doctor, Weissler becoming known as Krauss. The other, with which we are all familiar, was Anton de Trepniak.

"To return, then: At the time of his transfiguration Gühl was immersed in a study of the writings of Cagliostro. He had learned the necessity for intense concentration during the time that the physical change —which, he asserts, was agonizing—took place. As to the result, let me quote his own words."

Sir Provost sought for the passage in the manuscript, and then read aloud:

"'In this last agony I lost consciousness but firmly maintained my mental attitude to the last. When Weissler awakened me I was without pain. I was vigorous and knew a strange joy. My heart throbbed in my breast strongly, like the heart of a bull. I leapt to my feet, and running to a mirror, beheld the image of Cagliostro.'

"You see," said Sir Provost, looking up, "he recognized it, himself. And it was not merely physical, but also mental. From an untidy student, who had de-

voted his life to Science, he developed into a brilliant adventurer. His genius undimmed, endowed with a new love of astonishing, he sought to impress, to dazzle his fellowmen. No extravagance was too wild for indulgence. He determined to be more mad than Nero, more powerful than Alexander.

"There was, in his new life, an urgent necessity: that of discovering an uninterrupted series of healthy bodies from which Krauss, who usually operated, might obtain the vital secretion. Up to the time that he secured the means of—shall I say?—'broadcasting' his will, his difficulties in this respect were great. The bond between the man latterly called Krauss and that other whom we know as Trepniak, is not discoverable from these memoirs; but that Krauss sustained his synthetic life in constant fear that Trepniak one day would deprive him of the serum is mentioned more than once. On three occasions, apparently, this anxiety induced in Krauss an excess of zeal, and the subjects died."

The speaker turned to Torrington.

"The woman in Limehouse was the last victim," he said. "Thanks to your skill, Mrs. Lewisham was spared."

"Mrs. Lewisham!" Jasmine cried.

"Mrs. Lewisham, dear," her father explained, "was dangerously ill. Doctor Torrington has been attending her."

"But——" Jasmine began.

"Shall I tell her?" Torrington interrupted.

Sir Provost nodded slightly, and:

"In fact," said Torrington, "she was one of the victims selected by this modern vampire."

Following his words there were some moments of silence. Then:

"This was the fear which haunted Trepniak's second life," Sir Provost continued. "At somewhat irregular periods, I gather, the necessity for renewal of the treatment manifested itself. In short, the God of Things as They Are claimed him unexpectedly. In one hour, according to his own statement, he would age ten years if the serum chanced to be unavailable.

"I will pass over the fact that members of the feline and canine families regarded himself and Krauss with the utmost horror, and I shall proceed to the supreme and terrible penalty of this artificial life.

"During these premonitory seizures he found himself spiritually in the company of the dead! He slipped into that borderland to which he properly belonged, meeting there some who had suffered at his hands.

"At such times he would lose control of himself, and, as he admits, be thrown back upon the beliefs of his childhood; would seek refuge with any simple soul to whom the Cross was an emblem of faith, and where, according to his own account, he found peace. Yes! the daring investigator of forbidden things, the enemy of God, at times, as he confesses in this terrible human document, ran half-clad through empty streets, pursued by phantoms of the dead, in search of some church of Christ whose open doors offered sanctuary.

"A less spiritual and more material fear was that of the organization whose trust he had betrayed. He knew, by reason of his advanced studies, something of the identity of the man who sooner or later must trace him. He seems to have been strangely blind to the

fact that he might be approached on a plane outside the physical.

"His fear of death manifested itself in peculiar ways. His possessions, great and small, were studiedly ephemeral; no one of them was destined to outlive him. He spent millions on the appointments of his various homes, for he seems to have become incapable of contemplating any inanimate object which had existed earlier than himself, or which was likely to survive him. In short, where Gühl had been a genius, Trepniak became an inspired madman. The suppressed Gühl, who had been sacrificed to Science, manifested himself. Theosophists would say that the soul of Cagliostro possessed the body of Gühl in its new form, but I merely state the facts as they appear in this document.

"I have nearly finished, and it is day. Might I trouble you, Torrington, to make the fire blaze: I had it lighted for a particular purpose. In passing" —Sir Provost rapidly turned over several pages— "I may mention that Trepniak refers to his inability to influence persons of unsound mind and those suffering from loss of memory. There have been, of course, a number of women in his life—or should I have said 'his lives'? One of these, Madame Sabinov, he employed as an instrument of his incredible ambitions."

He paused, glancing at Jasmine. She was watching him intently, but she did not speak, therefore:

"Trepniak," he went on, "nevertheless, seems to have entertained a great and genuine admiration for Madame Sabinov. But the ultimate affection of his life, his glimpse of an ideal, of one fit to share with him the super-human destiny which he contemplated——"

His words were checked by a sudden clamour—a sustained ringing and hammering upon the street door, and:

"Who can it be?" Jasmine whispered, shivering slightly. "Don't leave me, Douglas."

Sir Provost stood up, and crossing to the fire which Torrington had kicked into a blaze, he tossed the manuscript upon it.

"Carey," he said, "I charge you solemnly to see that not a fragment remains unburned."

He turned, went out into the lobby, and opened the front door. A man stood there, hatless, dishevelled, in the porch, a big man, whose bronzed face looked grey in the light of early morning. As they confronted one another:

"Yes," Sir Provost said. "What do you want?"

"I come from M. de Trepniak," the other replied hoarsely.

CHAPTER XLII

THE EMPTY MANSION

"DIMITRI has bolted," said Teak. "All the other servants are at Southampton. They went yesterday, to join the yacht. We were to have sailed to-morrow."

Sir Provost Hope stared about him in undisguised amazement. These wonderful apartments, of which he had heard so much, were empty! Nothing but bare boards and stripped walls met the eye in any of the spacious rooms through which they passed. Of those priceless and bizarre appointments which fashionable London had competed for the privilege to view, not a trace remained. The great house of Trepniak was a memory.

He exchanged a significant glance with Torrington, as the two followed Teak up uncarpeted stairs; and:

"What has become of all the furniture?" Torrington asked; "is that at Southampton also?"

"No," Teak answered, glancing back; "it was taken away on Tuesday and Wednesday, twenty-three lorry loads, and burned in the furnaces of a firm at Shadwell. It was a contract. The heavy stuff was put aboard a lighter, and towed out and dropped in the sea. I was in charge of the job, myself. It was the same when we left Paris," he added.

Again the two men who followed him exchanged glances; but now they became silent.

The light of early morning was streaming through uncurtained windows into the bleak room which had been the library; and the masked door communicating with Trepniak's study was open. Pausing before it, Teak turned, his grim, weather-beaten face lined and haggard.

"Here, I finish," he said. "I won't go in—I can't go in. I've done my last job for him and I'm through. He told me to bring you two gentlemen along, and I have brought you. There's a door behind the table, and a stair. You'll find him in the room above."

He nodded shortly to each in turn, and recrossed the library, going out through the doorway by which they had entered, his heavy footsteps echoing hollowly.

Sir Provost and Torrington watched him, but he did not look back. Yet, in silence they stood staring at the doorway, long after he had gone, and listening to the dying sound of his footsteps as he tramped down the staircase of the empty house. Not until the distant bang of a door told of his final departure did their glances meet.

The face of Sir Provost Hope was pale and very stern. Torrington, gaunt, eagerly vital, regarded him with questioning eyes; and:

"I know the way," he said.

They entered the study. It was stripped, in common with the other rooms, and the strong door in the recess behind where the table had stood was ajar. At the foot of the steps beyond they paused. This room possessed no windows, but light shone in through the library door and, more dimly, down the staircase from above. No sound was audible. Sir Provost took a step forward.

"Let us go up," he said.

A few moments later the two entered that little isolated room in the tower. From here, also, the greater number of those strange and horrifying curiosities which once had occupied the shelves and cases had been removed. Since neither of these two hitherto had entered the room, they were unaware of this. They had no eyes for the laboratory, but only for its occupants.

Upon the tiled floor, in a dreadful, tortured attitude, lay a long-armed man, his hairy hands clenched convulsively, his head and features undistinguishable, indescribable, for the reason that a huge crystal which seemed to have dropped from the roof, and which lay shattered, had clearly fallen upon him, crushing his skull like an eggshell.

There was a gash in the metal ceiling where some fitting had been torn away, and part of a broken pedestal lay among the crystal fragments. Sunken in a revolving chair, staring down at the bloody horror of the floor, was one who at first glance appeared to be a stranger. Clutching the arms of the chair with slender, venous, white hands, he slowly raised his head and stared at the intruders.

As the glance of the cavernous eyes met his own, Torrington grasped Sir Provost's arm in a fierce grip, and:

"My God!" he said hoarsely; "can it be?"

"It *is*," Sir Provost replied, his voice no more than a whisper.

So they stood in that room of phantoms, contemplating the figure in the chair. It was that of a man whose shirt front was stained with blood, of a man whose clothes seemed too big for him—of one having

a deathly grey face and clammy neutral-coloured hair which hung down lankly upon his forehead. He achieved speech, even sought to smile; and the expression, when his grey lips were drawn back from his teeth, was so like that of a death-mask that Torrington, hardened though he was, shuddered.

"I thank you for coming." He spoke in a rattling, feeble voice. "But I knew I could count upon you."

Faintly, the guttural accents, the Teutonic inflections, might be discerned in this phanton voice.

"I have," he continued, "a bullet in my right lung. There is internal hemorrhage. You wonder no doubt that I am conscious, that I can speak."

The dreadful voice sank lower and lower.

"It is the last scientific miracle I shall ever perform."

He moved his glassy eyes from right to left.

"Indeed, I am already dead. You do not understand—but at this moment I am among the dead. Yet, now, I no longer fear them. I welcome them. He"—his wavering glance sought the figure on the floor—"my poor companion, returned to me to-night, wounded and mad. He wished our companionship to continue. His first wild shot"—the sunken eyes turned upward to the rent in the metal ceiling and then downward to the crystal fragments on the floor—"I diverted. You see the consequences. In the very moment of his own end he fired again—successfully."

The speaker became silent, and seemed to sink lower in his chair.

"Sir Provost!" Torrington whispered, "it isn't possible!"

"It *is* possible."

As the echo of a breeze, Trepniak's voice answered him.

"Look at Krauss: decomposition is present—in both of us. . . . I beg you not to remain after . . . I cease speaking. . . ."

"His cheeks are falling in!" Torrington whispered.

It was so; yet by an effort of his great will Trepniak spoke again.

"The diamond . . . it is—untainted . . . my wedding gift—to Jasmine. Never tell her . . . of—the end. . . ."

A loud disturbance arose from below. Inspector Whiteleaf and a party of police had arrived from Limehouse.

A very faint rattling sound issued from Trepniak's jaws. The venous white hand had turned grey, and now the flesh of his face collapsed, revealing the outlines of his skull. He began to settle in the chair like something which dissolved.

Sir Provost Hope turned suddenly and pushed Torrington down the stairs.

"Merciful God!" he said, "I can't face it."

* * *

And in the library in Half-Moon Street Carey sat with his arm around Jasmine, afraid to stir lest he should awaken her. Her weary little head pillowed on his shoulder, she had fallen asleep; and upon the dying embers of the fire a dense mass of grey ashes settled lower and lower—ashes of the Forbidden Wisdom.

THE END

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